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# Motion in Poetry:

A Psychophysical, Action-Based Approach to the Composition  
and Analysis of Metrical Dramatic Verse

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract:

Why do so few contemporary dramatists write in metrical verse? One of the chief criticisms levelled at modern verse drama has been that playwrights' use of verse fails to cohere with contemporary notions of dramatic action. As action-playing is largely a matter of text in performance, this thesis assumes that the best way to meet this challenge is to approach it as much from the perspective of the actor as from that of the playwright, and presents a psychophysical, action-based approach to the composition and analysis of metrical dramatic verse.

Verse rhythm is explored through the application of Rudolf Laban's concepts of Motion Factors and Working Actions, and with reference to contemporary theories of cognitive poetics. The rhythms of metrical verse are thereby understood and experienced as purposeful movements of the human body which are, in turn, understood and experienced as the psychophysical sensations of dramatic action. This approach, given the title of the Verse Psychology Game, draws together three original concepts:

1. Creating and interpreting dramatic texts according to Stanislavskian notions of action is a game, with the playwright as 'gamewright' and the actors as players.
2. The Motion in Poetry Metaphor: a conceptual metaphor that builds on the principles of the *Laban-Malmgren System* of 'movement psychology', allowing verse rhythms to be understood and experienced as embodied sensations of psychophysical dramatic action.

3. Hyperactivity: an 'intensified' form of action-playing that operates beyond the limits of 'naturalistic' performance. This enables a 'specialist game' in which verse serves a hyperactive dramatic function.

Within this framework, metrical dramatic verse can be created and interpreted on the basis of its performative potential. This is demonstrated through the development of a new methodology for metrical analysis, 'actorly' interpretations of Shakespearean dramatic verse, a series of training exercises that 'sensitise' the playwright to the performative potential of verse rhythm, and the creation of original material for a new verse play. This approach also aids actors, directors and teachers when making interpretative choices. The theories and techniques of the Verse Psychology Game are pedagogical tools that can contribute to broader programmes on dramatic writing and inform the methodologies of conservatoire actor-training.


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- Track 1:       “Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain”  
                  *Accompanying Section 5.2, pages 229-239.*
- Track 2:       “Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note”  
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- Track 3:       “But I know none and therefore am no beast”  
                  *Accompanying Section 5.5, pages 273-277.*
- Track 4:       Writing Exercise (Slashing Affordances)  
                  *Accompanying Section 6.1, pages 282-286.*

Lines included in the digital appendix are marked with the following symbol: 

## Prologue: A Playwright Prepares

The goal of this thesis is to present a new action-based approach to the composition and analysis of metrical dramatic verse. In developing this approach, I outline ways in which verse rhythm may be understood and experienced as embodying the psychophysical ‘sensations’ of dramatic action and how, as a result, metrical dramatic verse can be created and interpreted on the basis of its performative potential; that is, on the basis of its capacity to make a positive contribution to the psychologically-motivated interactions of dramatic characters.

The thesis is presented in two parts. The first part, entitled *Practice in Theory*, charts the development of the theoretical framework of the approach. The second part, entitled *Theory in Practice*, documents and demonstrates my work in translating the theory into practical techniques. This involves the creation of my own methodology for metrical analysis, the application of that methodology in the ‘actorly’ interpretation of Shakespearean dramatic verse and my use of the methodology as a tool for training and composition within my own dramatic writing.

This thesis can thus be described as practice-led research. Carole Gray defines such research as that, “initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners”<sup>1</sup> and this definition has been adopted by practitioner-researchers such as Estelle Barrett

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<sup>1</sup> Carole Gray, ‘Inquiry through practice: developing appropriate research strategies’ in Pekka Korvenmaa, ed., *No guru, no method: conference proceedings from the research institute* (University of Art and Design, Helsinki, 1996), 3.

and Barbara Bolt<sup>2</sup>. However, I follow Linda Candy in distinguishing research that is 'practice-led' from that which is 'practice-based':

There are two types of practice related research: practice-based and practice-led:

1. If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based.
2. If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led.<sup>3</sup>

She goes on to explain that:

Practice-led research is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. In a doctoral thesis, the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative work. The primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice.<sup>4</sup>

Such research "includes practice as an integral part of its method"<sup>5</sup> and this is the case here. In the second part of this thesis I describe and document my own creative process. However, the examples of my own dramatic writing are not

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<sup>2</sup> Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 147.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Candy, 'Practice based research: A guide.', *CCS Report 1* (Creativity and Cognition Studios, University of Technology, Sydney, 2006): 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



considered to be research outputs in themselves, rather they are the means by which I develop and demonstrate the “theories and techniques”<sup>6</sup> which are the original contribution of this thesis. The practical elements of the thesis are documented through “self-description”<sup>7</sup>, taking the form of ‘diarised’ accounts of my own creative process as I work within the framework of the Verse Psychology Game.

The ‘journey’ of my research may be charted as follows:

The initial research questions arise out of my own practice, they are investigated and contextualised within relevant theory, leading to the development of a new theoretical framework. This framework then leads to the development of techniques which act as the methodology for practice: this is documented and submitted to critical reflection, which then feeds back into theories and techniques for the purposes of future practice.

The motivation to explore the relationship between dramatic verse and dramatic action and to establish, for the first time, a clear set of principles by which to understand and exploit the mutually-reinforcing, symbiotic potential of that relationship, stems from my work as one of a very limited number of dramatists to be creating new verse plays for the contemporary British stage. The primary purpose of the research, therefore, has been to further my own practice and to

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<sup>6</sup> Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 25.

communicate the principles of the approach in such a way that they might be put to use by other twenty-first century playwrights who are either exploring or might be tempted to explore the use of metrical verse within their dramatic writing. In this respect, my work here follows the example of T. S. Eliot, who discussed his own dramatic verse “in the belief that any explorer or experimenter in new territory may, by putting on record a kind of journal of his own explorations, say something of use to those who follow him into the same regions and who will perhaps go farther”<sup>8</sup>.

As shall become apparent, however, the approach and attitude to dramatic versification developed in this thesis differs from Eliot’s in a number of important respects. Whilst Eliot refuses to engage with the acting process and, indeed, bemoans the fact that actors must be involved in his drama at all<sup>9</sup>, I argue that the best – perhaps the only – way for a playwright to understand, experience and become ‘sensitised’ to the relationship between verse and action is to approach dramatic verse and the process of dramatic versification from the perspective of an actor; to adopt what Eugenio Barba calls the “complementary point of view: that of the creative process of the individual performers”<sup>10</sup> and to share in what Francis Fergusson calls the “histrionic sensibility”<sup>11</sup> – that particular quality of experience-orientated imagination that facilitates the dramatic artist’s “perception of action”<sup>12</sup>. Crucial to the approach advocated in this thesis is the understanding that neither verse rhythm nor dramatic action are inherent qualities of a written text; they are

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Selected Prose* (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 75.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, trans. Richard Fowler (London: Routledge, 1994), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, (Princeton University Press, 1949), 236.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

experiential qualities of embodied performance. This means that a line of metrical verse cannot be rhythmical or active in and of itself, it can only afford rhythmical, active performance. Therefore, the only way to understand the performative potential of dramatic verse is to approach it as a performer.

This does not mean that in order to write dramatic verse using the approach advocated in this thesis one must be or have been a professional actor, but it does suggest that for the dramatist – as Harold Clurman suggests for the director<sup>13</sup> – some personal experience of the acting process may prove useful. In this respect, my own background as a verse dramatist who also has meaningful experience as a professional actor has afforded me a unique perspective on the challenges of relating the construction of dramatic verse to the embodied experiences of dramatic action. I trained as an actor at Drama Centre London and, alongside the development of my writing practice, I have spent the past decade working as a professional actor at theatres in London and around the UK<sup>14</sup>. These experiences have left me qualified to adopt the ‘complementary point of view’. Moreover, both the theoretical and the practical understandings of dramatic action advanced in this thesis draw heavily on the training I received at Drama Centre London.

The school, now part of the University of the Arts London (UAL), is steeped in the traditions and techniques of Stanislavsky, arguably “the most significant and most frequently quoted figure in the history of actor training”<sup>15</sup>. Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ is

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<sup>13</sup> Harold Clurman, *On Directing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 170.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief account of my professional experience, see Appendix II.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor* (London: Methuen Drama, 1998), vii.

recorded in his own trilogy of books *An Actor Prepares*<sup>16</sup>, *Building a Character*<sup>17</sup> and *Creating a Role*<sup>18 19</sup> and further insights may be gleaned from his autobiography *My Life in Art*<sup>20</sup>. His approach to acting has been expounded, expanded, interpreted and adapted by generations of theatre practitioners, with famous names such as Uta Hagen<sup>21</sup>, Stella Adler<sup>22</sup> and Michael Chekhov<sup>23</sup> numbered amongst those to have followed and furthered his work. So ubiquitous is Stanislavsky's influence that "the study of his ideas is on almost every acting academy timetable, every drama degree syllabus, every theatre studies exam, and – be it implicitly or explicitly – his terms and theories are on the lips of most Western acting practitioners"<sup>24</sup>.

A less well-known, though equally important aspect of the Drama Centre programme, is the methodological approach to actor training developed by one of the school's founding teachers, Yat Malmgren. Malmgren's approach, christened the *Laban-Malmgren System* by Vladimir Mirodan in his thesis on the subject<sup>25</sup>, expands and adapts the work of the renowned dance practitioner Rudolf Laban for the purposes of the actor, augmenting Stanislavskian notions of dramatic action with Laban's understanding of "action and effort"<sup>26</sup>. As shall become apparent,

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<sup>16</sup> Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Hapgood (London: Methuen Drama, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, trans. Elizabeth Hapgood (London: Methuen Drama, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Constantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, trans. Elizabeth Hapgood (London: Methuen Drama, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> The accuracy of Hapgood's translations has been challenged in recent years (see below). However, I cite these versions as those familiar to several generations of English-speaking theatre practitioners.

<sup>20</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. Jean Benedetti (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Uta Hagen, *Respect for Acting* (London: Macmillan Collier Macmillan, 1973).

<sup>22</sup> Stella Adler, *The Art of Acting* (New York: Applause, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Bella Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Mirodan, 'The Way of Transformation (the Laban-Malmgren System of Dramatic Character Analysis).' (Ph.D., Royal Holloway, University of London, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Laban, *The Mastery of Movement*, ed. Lisa Ullmann, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: Macdonald & Evans, 1971), 74–89.

these complementary aspects of the Drama Centre training are key components in the approach to dramatic verse developed in this thesis and, whilst theoretical understandings of these systems might be gleaned from written texts – Stanislavsky’s system from his own writings and from those of commentators such as Jean Benedetti<sup>27</sup>, Bella Merlin<sup>28</sup>, Sonia Moore<sup>29</sup> and Sharon Marie Carnicke<sup>30</sup>, and the *Laban-Malmgren System* from Mirodan’s thesis and from books by Janys Hayes<sup>31</sup> and Christopher Fettes<sup>32</sup> – the embodied understanding I gained from my time at the school has been invaluable to the progress of my research.

That the need for a playwright to adopt an actor’s attitude to verse and action is a core principle of this thesis is reflected in the fact that I spend at least as much time discussing verse from an actor’s point of view as from a perspective that could be regarded as being unique to the dramatist. In attempting to build on the work of practitioners such as John Barton, whose stated aim of “marrying the two traditions”<sup>33</sup> (Stanislavskian action-playing on the one hand and Shakespearean verse-speaking on the other) creates clear parallels between his interests and my own, I find myself speaking not only as an actor but to the actor. By which I mean to say that, although this thesis has its origins in questions about the writing process, its implications for the acting process are no less significant.

Furthermore, whilst the number of playwrights either creating or aspiring to create

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<sup>27</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*.

<sup>28</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*.

<sup>29</sup> Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of an Actor: Digested from the Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1984).

<sup>30</sup> Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Janys Hayes, *The Knowing Body: Yat Malmgren’s Acting Technique* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Fettes, *A Peopled Labyrinth: The Histrionic Sense: An Analysis of the Actor’s Craft*, (London: GFCA Publishing, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1984), 24.

original verse drama seems to be, at least at present, very small, the number of those either working as or training to become Shakespearean actors is, comparatively, great indeed. In establishing an experiential link between verse-speaking and action-playing, then, the approach advanced in this thesis may find application in the acting world, as much as if not more, than in the realms of twenty-first century playwriting.

I submit that the principles underpinning my approach to the analysis and interpretation of dramatic verse have much to offer the contemporary actor. However, this thesis is not intended as an acting manual *per se* and I suggest that further work is required in order to adapt the methodology articulated herein for the practical needs of the actor<sup>34</sup>. The first thing to consider is that whilst I adopt an actor's point of view in my discussions of the performative potential of dramatic verse, and whilst the purpose of those discussions is to highlight experiential qualities of the verse that might be exploited by the actor, the system of metrical analysis that I develop and demonstrate is, of necessity, detailed, technical and, doubtlessly, painstaking. In theory, an actor with the patience and capacity for such in-depth analytical work could employ this system in precisely the manner that I describe. In practice, the majority of actors may prefer and be more susceptible to alternative methods of 'sensitisation'. With this in mind, I suggest that my approach to metrical analysis, as presented in this thesis, offers more to practitioners engaged in the training of actors than it does to the actors themselves. Such practitioners could adapt the principles of the approach to the

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<sup>34</sup> It is therefore beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a full account of how the principles of the Verse Psychology Game might be taken forward as part of an actor's rehearsal process or to suggest or demonstrate acting exercises that adapt my methodology of textual analysis.

embodied learning processes appropriate to conservatoire training. The idea that practitioners may become ‘sensitised’ to the performative potential of metrical verse is central to the argument of this thesis. The notion of ‘sensitisation’ presupposes that some writers and actors may possess an intuitive level of sensitivity that allows them to both experience and make use of the rhythmic and active qualities of metrical verse without the need for any kind of specialist training or analysis. In other words, like any system that seeks to make conscious and trainable the ‘mysterious’ processes of creative endeavour, the approach advanced here can only supplement rather than replace the virtues of ‘natural talent’.

Another consideration is that the acting process is an iterative and collaborative endeavour. As the perspective offered here is that of a playwright adopting an actor’s attitude, the discussion is restricted to that portion of an actor’s work with direct relevance to the playwright’s own efforts in creating, revising and evaluating dramatic verse. This means that the examination of the acting process offered in this thesis confines itself to what the Stanislavskian teacher and commentator Bella Merlin calls “mental reconnaissance”<sup>35</sup>: the process of textual exploration by which an individual actor makes a series of preliminary performance choices. In order to incorporate this work into a more complete acting methodology, further investigation is required into how these initial choices may be explored, shared, challenged and refined in the collaborative environment of the rehearsal room. I believe that such investigation may prove to be very rewarding and that, again, teachers of acting may be the best qualified to carry out such work. However, a

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<sup>35</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 61.

discussion of the more advanced stages of rehearsal lies beyond the scope of the present study.

In focussing on the three-way relationship between author, text and actor, I may be accused of excluding the audience – a deadly sin for any theatre practitioner. My defence is that, for the reasons given above, I am assuming that until one has attained an understanding of what actors might do with dramatic verse, one cannot begin to discuss the impact of that verse on an audience with any degree of precision. On that basis, I am suspending rather than disregarding questions of how the use of dramatic verse might affect the spectator and of the active role of the audience in shaping the interpretation of a performance, firm in the belief that such considerations are worthy of further investigation and may provide rich fodder for future research.

\* \* \*

Before investigating the relationship between dramatic verse and dramatic action it is necessary to have a clear understanding of what is meant by each of these terms in isolation. What do I mean, then, when I talk of dramatic verse?

Eliot defines his own use of the term by distinguishing between ‘three voices of poetry’:



The first is the voice of the poet talking to himself – or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character.<sup>36</sup>

Eliot's 'third voice' is a useful way of explaining what we mean by dramatic verse. I expand on this description by saying that the dialogue between characters must form part of a script for theatrical performance. Eliot, however, clearly identifies dramatic versification as a branch of poetry. Of this, Denis Donoghue tells us, we should be cautious: "Verse drama is a purely technical phrase. It makes no implication whatever as to the quality of the script or of the play as a whole. Unlike 'poetic drama' is it entirely neutral in its application"<sup>37</sup>. In my view, the value of Donoghue's intervention is in emphasising the need to maintain a distinction between the 'poetic' qualities of verse – which may have nothing whatsoever to do with drama – and the *dramatic* qualities of verse – which may have nothing whatsoever to do with 'poetry'. This distinction also means that, however 'poetic' and, indeed, 'rhythmic', the dialogue found in the prose works of playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Howard Barker, Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Edward Bond, Carol Churchill, David Mamet, Sarah Kane and others may be, the consideration of such plays remains beyond the scope of the present study.

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Three Voices of Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1954), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Denis Donoghue, *The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama* (Oxford University Press, 1959), 3.

However, the use of the term ‘verse’ may not, in and of itself, lead to the clear-cut, technical understanding that Donoghue seems to suppose.

Throughout this thesis, when I discuss dramatic verse I am discussing metrical dramatic verse; that is, dramatic verse written in a recognised and identifiable metrical form such as iambic pentameter, trochaic hexameter or four-beat accentual metre. Initially, I made the decision to limit my exploration of verse in this way simply in order to give appropriate parameters to the scope of my research and to avoid confusion over where to draw the boundaries between terms such as verse, free verse, prose poetry, poetic prose, rhythmical prose, heightened language and so on. As my research developed, however, the significance of metrical form became increasingly apparent. The cognitive poetics of Reuven Tsur and his theory of “rhythmical performance”<sup>38</sup> in particular play a leading role in the approach to dramatic versification developed in this thesis. Rhythmical performance involves an experience of ‘tension’ arising from the performer’s attempt to make two patterns “simultaneously accessible to awareness”<sup>39</sup>. These two patterns I come to refer to as the Neutral Line and the Natural Line. The Neutral Line is the pattern of the metre: a sequence of ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ metrical positions organised according to a particular structure. The Natural Line is the ‘prose pattern’ of the line’s construction: a particular sequence of speech sounds, words and phrases. From the recognition of these two patterns, it follows that the experiential qualities ascribed to such

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<sup>38</sup> Reuven Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm: Structure and Performance : An Empirical Study in Cognitive Poetics* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

‘rhythmical performance’ can only arise from embodied explorations of verse written in metre.

In the second half of the thesis, the discussion shifts from a consideration of metrical dramatic verse in general to a specific focus on dramatic verse written in iambic pentameter. The reasons for this emphasis are discussed in Chapter 3<sup>40</sup> and stem not only from practical considerations but from the cognitive principles of Tsur’s “perception-oriented theory of metre”<sup>41</sup> and the concept of metre as a “neural lyre”<sup>42</sup> first put forward by the poet and scholar Frederick Turner and later supported by the evolutionary literary critic Brian Boyd<sup>43</sup>. Building on these discussions, I argue that, when it comes to English-language dramatic verse, iambic pentameter is perfectly suited to the task in hand: the embodied imitation of an action.

What, then, do we mean by dramatic action? It is possible to distinguish three broad types or modes of ‘action’ as the term is used in the discussion of drama. These I describe using the terms ‘Ideological Action’, ‘Industrial Action’ and ‘Interpersonal Action’:

By Ideological Action I mean the progression of an ‘idea’ that can be understood as both driving and being unfolded by the events of the play and

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<sup>40</sup> See section 3.4

<sup>41</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Frederick Turner, *Natural Classicism: Essays on Literature and Science* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1985), 61–105.

<sup>43</sup> Brian Boyd, *Why Lyrics Last* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 16–17.

the words and deeds of its characters. Fergusson, in attempting to explicate Aristotelian action, says, “I do not mean the events of the story but the focus or aim of psychic life from which the events, in that situation, result”<sup>44</sup>. This explanation bears some resemblance to what Lajos Egri in *The Art of Dramatic Writing* calls the “premise”<sup>45</sup> of a play, giving as an example the premise of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* as “ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction”<sup>46</sup>. The Ideological Action is not the bald statement of such an idea but the process of expounding it through the dramatic form. The central idea, expressed through the Ideological Action, is what the play is about.

The Ideological Action, then, depends upon but is not the same as the plot. The plot – the ‘mechanical’ progression of events – is what I term the Industrial Action of a play: ‘this happens, then this happens, then this happens’. While Fergusson is keen to distinguish action from plot<sup>47</sup>, I suggest that the continued and widespread use of the term ‘action’ to refer to plot still needs to be acknowledged. When we say that a play is ‘action-packed’ we are talking about ‘stuff happening’, not about the density of the ideas that unfold through the drama. The events of a play’s Industrial Action tend to involve characters doing things to and with one another, which brings me to the third mode of dramatic action: Interpersonal Action.

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<sup>44</sup> Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, 229–30.

If the characters of a play are understood as ‘functions of the plot’ – that is, if the things done by the characters are understood as being done simply because that’s what happens next in the story – then the behaviour of the characters can be regarded as no more than a facet of the Industrial Action of the play. If, however, we are to treat dramatic characters as if they were conscious agents exhibiting purposeful, goal-driven behaviour then, whilst their deeds remain an integral part of the Industrial Action, they are not reducible to plot alone. The basic principle of Stanislavskian acting is that “everything you do on the stage – even if you’re simply sitting in silence – has to be *for a purpose*.”<sup>48</sup> By which it is meant that, everything you do on the stage as a character must serve a purpose for the character. It is not enough to say that I am doing something on stage in order to tell the story, or in order to affect or inform the audience, or because ‘that’s what it says in the script’; I must be able to justify my behaviour as purposeful from the imagined perspective of the character that I am playing. Put simply, when I stand on stage and ‘recite’ lines of text, the situation with which I am imaginatively engaged involves my character trying to affect or change the situation and/or another character, in a particular way, for a particular reason and with the aim of achieving a particular outcome.

This process of characters doing and saying things for a purpose is what Stanislavskian practitioners refer to as dramatic action and, as Stanislavsky himself says, “action is the chief element of our art – genuine, productive,

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<sup>48</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 132.

expedient action”<sup>49</sup>. Interpersonal Action, then, is my primary concern in this thesis and may be glossed as ‘the flow of psychologically-motivated behaviour ascribed to dramatic characters’. This ‘flow’ of Interpersonal Action can be broken down into the goal-directed actions and activities of each character<sup>50</sup>.

A dramatic character’s action at any given moment is the “task” that he or she is carrying out, or attempting to carry out, in order to achieve a particular goal or “objective”. This usually involves an attempt to affect or change the behaviour of another character: to make someone else act, think or feel differently. For example, my character’s action might be ‘to gain forgiveness from my mother’, or ‘to convince my lover to accept my marriage proposal’, or ‘to win the vote of my constituent’, or ‘to elicit a full confession from the murder suspect’, or ‘to make my commander believe that his wife has been unfaithful’. An action can be broken down into a series of activities. A dramatic activity is a ‘tactic’ employed by the character with the aim of fulfilling his or her action within the scene. An activity is described using a transitive (‘active’) verb such as ‘to intimidate’ or ‘to tease’ or ‘to coax’. If my action is ‘to gain forgiveness from my mother’ then my first activity in the scene might be ‘to charm’. The purpose of the activity is to fulfil my action: to

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<sup>49</sup> Cited in Vasilii Osipovich Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal: The Final Years*, trans. Jean Benedetti (London: Routledge, 1998), 215.

<sup>50</sup> Translations of Stanislavsky’s Russian term *zadacha* have caused no end of confusion amongst English-speaking actors and teachers of acting. It has been variously rendered as ‘objective’, ‘task’, ‘target’, ‘action’, ‘activity’, ‘want’, ‘intention’, etc. For the purposes of my analysis, I choose to use the terminology introduced into this country, first at the Drama Centre and then at the RADA, by the respected acting teacher Doreen Cannon (herself a first-generation student of Uta Hagen) and which continues to be taught at these schools and elsewhere. Like Cannon, I find terms such as ‘actions’ and ‘activities’ not only accessibly descriptive of their meanings, but also closely aligned with the psychophysical emphasis of the *Laban-Malmgren System*, alongside which they evolved historically.

charm my mother into forgiving me. If that activity fails to get me what I want then I might try a new one: ‘to shame’, for example.

This idea of dramatic action is closely allied to Stanislavsky’s concept of dramatic “truth”<sup>51</sup>. Action is truthful if it displays “some kind of logic and coherence”<sup>52</sup> within the dramatic context. However, as Bella Merlin is keen to point out, “logic doesn’t have to mean mathematical logic: our emotions can have their own logic, which at first may seem utterly chaotic, but with time reveals itself to have an absolute coherence”<sup>53</sup>. Put simply, action is truthful if one can provide some form of plausible explanation as to why this particular character would behave in this particular way in these particular circumstances. One must be careful to maintain a distinction between ‘truth’ and verisimilitude; between what Stanislavsky called “scenic truth” and “actual fact”<sup>54</sup>. The former refers to behaviour that can be considered logical and coherent within the imagined world and circumstances of the play, whereas the latter refers to behaviour that would be considered logical and coherent in everyday life. As the actor and director John Harrop notes, “the ‘reality’ [or ‘truth’] of a performance has no inherent connection with the degree of fidelity with which it reproduces the facts of actual life”<sup>55</sup>. This means that Stanislavsky’s notion of dramatic truth can be applied just as readily to a work of science fiction or fantasy as it can to a ‘kitchen sink drama’ or to an episode of a television soap opera. The same goes for ‘non-naturalistic’ writing and performance styles: “it doesn’t matter what genre, medium or character type you’re

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<sup>51</sup> Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 128.

<sup>52</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 114.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 128.

<sup>55</sup> John Harrop, *Acting* (London: Routledge, 2004), 43.

exploring or how far-fetched the realms of the script's 'reality' might be, your choices as an actor can have the same degree of specificity that you'd apply to psychological realism"<sup>56</sup>. This has immediate implications for a discussion of verse drama in that one may concede that it is 'unrealistic' for dramatic characters to speak in verse (in the sense that it's not what real people do every day on the street) without assuming that it is inherently 'untruthful'. A tendency to associate Stanislavskian acting solely with the conventions of 'psychological realism' can be traced to the interpretation placed on the approach by proponents of American Method acting<sup>57</sup>. Sharon Marie Carnicke is perhaps foremost amongst those who reject this "assumed but inaccurate link between the multivalent training System and the aesthetic style of Psychological Realism," and to insist that Stanislavsky's approach, "can take the contemporary actor into any dramatic style"<sup>58</sup>. Carnicke places great emphasis on the importance of the Russian word *perezhivanie* to a Stanislavskian understanding of dramatic truth<sup>59</sup>. Contradicting Hapgood, she translates the word as 'experiencing', and uses it in the sense that an actor's sense of 'truth' comes from experiencing the character and the situation rather than 'living' it<sup>60</sup>.

Contemporary Stanislavskians such as Merlin and Carnicke insist that Stanislavsky's approach is not purely 'psychological' but 'psychophysical' in nature, rooted in the understanding that "each of your physical actions holds within a psychological resonance, and, conversely, your psychological state

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<sup>56</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 9–11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 129–48.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.



impacts on your physical expression”<sup>61</sup> or, put simply, that “the mind and body are inseparable”<sup>62</sup>. Such an understanding brings Stanislavskian practice into line with contemporary theories of embodied cognition, which take as their starting point the notion that “the mind is inherently embodied”<sup>63</sup> and that Cartesian dualism – the consideration of mind and body as separate entities – must therefore be rejected<sup>64</sup>. The findings of cognitive and neuroscientific research have had a significant impact on twenty-first century commentators such as Rhonda Blair, who uses these theories to critique “twentieth-century approaches that compartmentalise different aspects of the actor’s being”<sup>65</sup> and argues that “cognitive scientists, neurophysiologists and psychologists are proving that Stanislavsky... began intuiting something fundamental about how we, as human beings and as actors, work”<sup>66</sup>.

The actor and writer Rick Kemp calls for a “shift to a holistic concept of the bodymind”<sup>67</sup> within contemporary theatre practice and highlights techniques, such as those of Laban and Lecoq, which link ‘outer’ physical movements to the ‘inner’ experiences of psychological states and processes. Laban’s work “helps actors to make the connection between experiential physical activity

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<sup>61</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 222.

<sup>63</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Rhonda Blair, ‘Image and Action: Cognitive Neuroscience and Actor Training’ in Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart, eds., *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 181.

<sup>66</sup> Rhonda Blair, ‘The Method and the Computational Theory of Mind’ in David Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 204.

<sup>67</sup> Rick Kemp, *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Performance* (London: Routledge, 2012), xv.

and the idea of dramatic ‘actions’ (activities in the pursuit of a goal)”<sup>68</sup>. The experiential truth of this connection is at the very heart of the *Laban-Malmgren System* and, indeed, at the very heart of this thesis. The foundational principle of the *Laban-Malmgren System* is that “between certain psychological functions and certain physical functions there is a direct correspondence”<sup>69</sup>. This echoes, or rather anticipates, the notion of holistic embodied cognition. To exploit this psychophysical principle within the practical world of actor-training, Malmgren expanded and emphasised Laban’s notion of “Effort”, so that “Effort represents a direct and mutually reinforcing correspondence between physical and psychological energies.”<sup>70</sup> This means that the energy of a ‘psychological’ dramatic activity can be understood and experienced as sharing the psychophysical sensation of a particular physical movement. As a result, an activity such as ‘to intimidate’ can be experienced by the actor and embodied in performance through the psychophysical energy of a purposeful physical movement such as Pressing (with a Press in Laban’s terms referring to a Strong/Direct/Sustained movement of the human body<sup>71</sup>).

This foundational principle of the *Laban-Malmgren System* and its implications for this thesis are explored in detail in Chapter 2. For now, suffice it to say that the question with which I grapple concerns the capacity of metrical dramatic verse to contribute to the Interpersonal Action of drama, understood as the flow of embodied, goal-directed behaviour attributed to

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>69</sup> Mirodan, 'The Way of Transformation', 12.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>71</sup> Laban, *The Mastery of Movement*, 77.

dramatic characters. By the end of this thesis, I aim to have demonstrated that metrical dramatic verse does indeed have this capacity and that, moreover, this capacity may be consciously explored and exploited within the context of contemporary theatre practice.

Before moving on from this introduction it is important to highlight several considerations that limit the scope of this investigation.

Firstly, it should be noted that, whilst in contextualising my research questions I examine the apparent 'failings' of twentieth century verse drama, my primary aim is to make an original contribution to contemporary practice. This thesis is not intended as a work of literary criticism and it is therefore beyond the scope of this study to provide a fresh critique of twentieth century verse plays or to update the work of previous critics by assessing the artistic merit of more recent attempts to create original verse drama by playwrights such as Tony Harrison, Glyn Maxwell and Mike Bartlett. In turning my attention to the verse drama of the past century my interest is in determining the extent to which the criticisms levelled at twentieth century writers might be relevant to the challenges faced by contemporary verse dramatists and in examining any modern theories of, and methodologies for dramatic versification that might inform the practice of twenty-first century playwrights.

A second consideration relates to the application of Stanislavskian and/or 'psychological' acting principles to historical texts such as Shakespeare's. As shall

become apparent, opinion is divided amongst contemporary critics and practitioners as to the value of Stanislavskian approaches to texts written in previous centuries. There are, I suggest, two main strands to these ongoing debates. The first concerns the effectiveness of ‘psychological’ approaches to plays such as Shakespeare’s. The second concerns the ‘appropriateness’ and ‘authenticity’ of such approaches. For the purposes of this thesis, my focus is on the first of these strands. My interest in Stanislavskian approaches to Shakespearean verse stems from the assumption that if practitioners have discovered effective methodologies for linking verse-speaking and action-playing then – regardless of the ‘authenticity’ of such working methods – the techniques employed by these practitioners may be of use to me in developing a new writing methodology for use in the present day. In suggesting that the ideas advanced in this thesis may be of use to contemporary Shakespearean actors, my claim is not that alternative, non-Stanislavskian attitudes to such texts are ‘wrong’ or ‘inferior’, but merely that if practitioners choose to approach Shakespeare’s verse from an action-playing perspective then the theories and techniques of the Verse Psychology Game might allow them to do so more effectively. A broader discussion concerning the ‘appropriateness’ and the overall artistic merit of ‘psychologising’ Shakespeare lies beyond the scope of the present study.

Thirdly, it should be noted that whilst I demonstrate, through my own practice, techniques and exercises that could be employed by other playwrights and included as part of a dramatic writing programme, I do not attempt to offer an account of teaching those techniques to other dramatists or dramatic writing students. An investigation of that process – perhaps in the form an extended

action research project – is a further phase of work and lies beyond the scope of the present study.

## Chapter Overview:

### **Part 1: Practice in Theory**

#### Chapter 1: Active Measures

In this chapter I situate my research within the context of contemporary theatre practice and explore the challenges of relating dramatic verse to dramatic action by examining criticisms of English-language verse drama written in the twentieth century. Having identified T. S. Eliot as the only twentieth century verse dramatist working in the English language to offer a coherent, documented account of his attempts to address these challenges, I offer a critique of his approach, and conclude that a contradiction emerges within his theory of dramatic versification: having specified that verse must adhere to the principle of dramatic utility, the positive function he ascribes to verse in drama is found to be inherently 'undramatic', involving the 'suspension' of dramatic action for the purposes of emotional expression. As a result, Eliot's solution to the apparent 'problem of action' can only be regarded as a negative solution: his notion of dramatic utility prohibits verse from obstructing dramatic action but no coherent explanation is offered as to how verse might contribute to dramatic action. Eliot's dismissive view of actors and the acting process is also highlighted and contrasted with my own assumption that engaging with the challenges, and indeed the opportunities, that dramatic verse might present for modern day actors can play a vital role in understanding its performative potential.

Attention is then turned to contemporary approaches to interpreting dramatic verse for performance, with a particular focus on links made between dramatic verse and action-playing. It is noted that writers on Stanislavskian acting technique tend to either ignore the issue of verse altogether or to direct readers to the work of practitioners who specialise in ‘voice and text’ training for actors. Similarly, practitioners who provide actors with advice about verse-speaking tend to either ignore issues of action-playing or to acknowledge the concept without making clear how this relates to the actor’s work on the verse. When it comes to addressing this issue, the most explicit statement of intent is made by John Barton in announcing the need to “marry the two traditions”<sup>72</sup>. Barton’s work suggests that links can be made between verse-speaking and action-playing, but the precise nature of those links remains unclear and, more often than not, qualities ascribed to the verse are ‘emotional’ or ‘poetic’ rather than active.

Abigail Rokison’s critique of dominant approaches to interpreting dramatic verse for performance raises a further issue. She is highly critical of the fact that practitioners such as Peter Hall treat features of Shakespeare’s verse as ‘instructions’ for the actor, basing their interpretations of the verse on their apparent ability to decode the author’s intentions<sup>73</sup>. Rokison argues that such approaches are both dubious in theory and undesirable in practice, involving fallacious appeals to authority and stifling the actor’s interpretative freedom. Following her argument, I suggest that to accept such ‘prescriptive’ approaches may be just as damaging for the writing process as it is for the acting process,

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<sup>72</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Abigail Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking: Text and Theatre Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8–36.

reducing the art of metrical composition to a seemingly 'arbitrary' coding system. However, I argue that whilst liberating the actor from the prescriptions of the playwright (or of the authority who claims to understand the playwright's will) might be desirable in itself, it could create an 'is-ought gap' in the process of analysing and interpreting dramatic verse: if the features of dramatic verse do not place any restrictions on the interpretive choices of the actor, then how can an analysis of those features tell us anything about how the verse 'ought' to be performed?

If, as my research suggests, there is neither an extant account of a coherent writing methodology for making dramatic verse active nor a documented approach to interpreting dramatic verse for performance in which verse-speaking and action-playing are linked explicitly and consistently, then I submit that there are two main routes to achieving the aims of this thesis. The first would be to search for examples of texts and performances that, on the basis of 'mysterious intuitions', 'feel' more active than others. The task then would be to dissect those examples in an effort to identify the features that made them 'successful' and to 'deduce' a methodology that would allow similar features to be instilled in and/or facilitated by a new piece of writing. The second route – and the path that I follow in this thesis – is to examine the essential features of metrical verse, to ask how, in principle, those features might contribute to the creation and embodiment of dramatic action, and to develop strategies that would allow that potential to be realised. It would not be possible to explore both avenues fully whilst maintaining sensible limits on the scope of this investigation. My reasons for choosing the second route are as follows:



Firstly, the idea of creating new verse drama by picking out examples of ‘good’ dramatic verse and seeking to imitate them has been tried before – most notably by Romantic poets such as Shelley and Keats – and those experiments have generally been regarded as unsuccessful<sup>74</sup>. By first developing a theoretical framework within which to understand the active potential of metrical verse and then seeking to examine verse such as Shakespeare’s within the context of that framework, I aim to learn from such examples without falling into the trap of imitating an author rather than an action. Secondly, critics such as Donoghue and Hinchliffe have provided extensive critiques of the plays produced by modern verse dramatists. Such studies have revealed a great deal about why many twentieth century verse plays might be considered ‘failures’, but they have not provided – in clear and explicit terms – a strategy by which future dramatists might learn to ‘succeed’. Whilst the efforts of those critics could be updated to include the works of more recent verse dramatists, I see no reason to suppose that simply repeating such an approach should yield different results when it comes to furthering the practice of contemporary writers. Thirdly, if, as the work of Donoghue and Hinchliffe suggests, it is easier for such an approach to pinpoint the reasons for ‘failure’ than those for ‘success’, then a writing methodology gleaned from such observations is likely to be based – as I accuse Eliot’s of being – on the avoidance of ‘negative’ features rather than on the active pursuit of ‘positive’ ones.

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<sup>74</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 18-31.

## Chapter 2: Motion in Poetry

This chapter proposes a new theoretical framework for the construction and interpretation of metrical dramatic verse in which the verse might be understood as making a positive contribution to the Interpersonal Action of a play. This framework brings together three concepts developed in response to the challenges identified in the previous chapter.

The first is that Stanislavskian acting can be understood as following the structure of a game that is played in accordance with a set of constitutive rules. These rules demand plausible and playable performance choices made in line with Stanislavskian notions of dramatic truth and dramatic action, and these rules are accepted by the player precisely because they make the game of Stanislavskian acting possible. This game structure has the potential to close the 'is-ought gap' of interpretative practice, thereby allowing both playwrights and actors to make informed judgements about the success or appropriateness of a particular line or performance choice, whilst still allowing both sets of practitioners a considerable degree of artistic freedom.

The second concept is that of dramatic hyperactivity. I argue that if verse can be understood as intensifying rather than diminishing the pursuit of dramatic action then it can function as a specialist 'lusory tool' within a specialised version of the Stanislavskian acting game.

The third concept is what I refer to as the Motion in Poetry Metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson have argued that the use of metaphor is not merely a poetic or rhetorical trope, but an essential feature of the way in which human beings come to understand and experience themselves and the world around them<sup>75</sup>. There is an example of what Lakoff and Johnson call a conceptual metaphor at the heart of the *Laban-Malmgren System*: “psychological action is physical action”<sup>76</sup>. The application of this metaphor allows theatre practitioners to understand and experience dramatic actions and activities in terms of physical movements and, more specifically, in terms of a human being’s goal-directed sensorimotor acts. I suggest that the experiential qualities of verse rhythm are often understood in terms of a similar conceptual metaphor: verse rhythm is physical movement. By extending and systematising this metaphorical understanding of verse rhythm in line with Laban’s analysis of physical movement, I suggest that the two metaphors can be conflated. As a result, verse rhythms are understood and experienced as purposeful movements of the human body, which are, in turn, understood and experienced as the psychophysical sensations of dramatic action. In other words, rhythmical performances of metrical verse can embody psychophysical dramatic activities.

As an acknowledgment of the principles of ‘movement psychology’ that underpin the *Laban-Malmgren System*, I call the framework that encompasses the three concepts of acting-as-game-playing, dramatic hyperactivity and the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, the Verse Psychology Game.

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<sup>75</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, New Edition (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3–6.

<sup>76</sup> Vladimir Mirodan, ‘Acting the Metaphor: The Laban–Malmgren System of Movement Psychology and Character Analysis’, *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 6, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 40.

### Chapter 3: Rhythm Games

In this chapter I argue that, in order to complete the game structure I have articulated, an understanding is required of the constitutive rules governing the perception and interpretation of verse rhythm. This requires an exploration of the metrical and cognitive principles of verse rhythm and an explanation as to how and why perceptions of metrical verse might give rise to experiential qualities of physical movement in a way that sets it apart from text written in prose, thus facilitating dramatic hyperactivity. I consider that Reuven Tsur's theory of cognitive poetics offers a usefully coherent explanation of metrical verse rhythm, having significant advantages over humanist and generativist theories, and that his notions of rhythmical performance and rhythmic competence are perfectly suited to the game-playing framework outlined in Chapter 2. I argue that Tsur's theories are not only compatible with the principles of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, but that his explanation of rhythmical performance may be improved and enhanced through the application of this metaphorical concept. Tsur's perception-oriented theory of metre allows a further constitutive rule to be articulated for the Verse Psychology Game: performance choices must be perceivable. That is, a performance choice must, in accordance with Tsur's principles of rhythmical performance, provide 'perceptual solutions' to the 'perceptual problems' presented by the construction of the verse.

The final section of this chapter is focused on the study of iambic pentameter, and explores the advantages of this particular verse form by drawing on Tsur's

cognitive principles and on the notion of metre as a ‘neural lyre’<sup>77</sup>. This discussion completes the theoretical framework for my approach to dramatic verse and attention then turns to the task of translating these principles into practical methodologies for analysis and composition.

## **Part 2: Theory in Practice**

### **Chapter 4: The Anatomy of Verse**

Although Tsur’s theories contradict the principles of humanist and generativist scansion, he does not offer an alternative systematic approach to metrical analysis that would bring all of the relevant perceptual features of verse construction to the attention of the performer<sup>78</sup>. This chapter outlines a new system of metrical analysis, developed in line with Tsur’s principles and those of the Verse Psychology Game. The aim of the methodology is to avoid the apparent pitfalls of humanist and generativist scansion, whilst ensuring that due attention is drawn to every relevant perceptual feature of verse construction.

Taking inspiration from Laban’s process of distilling physical movement into four elements or Motion Factors, this new system of scansion analyses lines of iambic pentameter in terms of four ‘Metrical Factors’. The perceptual features of metrical

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<sup>77</sup> This is the idea that certain metres, including iambic pentameter, exploit the ‘rhythms’ of embodied human cognition. See section 3.4.

<sup>78</sup> The word performer is used here to refer not only to actors but to other practitioners, including the playwright. The principle being that verse rhythm is a feature of performance, even if that performance is enacted silently by the reader.

verse are thus described in terms of Bones, Joints, Muscle Tone and Muscle Tissue and the process of metrical scansion is given the name of the Anatomical Approach. This analytical approach does not obviate the fact that performers with high levels of intuitive rhythmic competence can arrive at rhythmical and, indeed, hyperactive performance choices without employing conscious means of metrical analysis. In other words, the Verse Psychology Game can be played successfully – and the text for the game wrought – without the use of the Anatomical Approach. The use of the approach is therefore regarded, not as a constitutive rule of the game, but as a ‘rule of skill’ within it.

The value of the approach resides in its capacity to explain how and why a particular verse construction might give rise to particular experiential qualities and to facilitate the possibility of a systematic, conscious decision-making process on the part of playwrights and other theatre practitioners. More practically, the advantage of the approach is that, by bringing to attention features of verse construction that might otherwise go unnoticed and by encouraging rhythmical performance choices that take account of those features, it can be used as a training tool to ‘sensitise’ the practitioner to the performative potential of metrical dramatic verse, thereby expanding and developing his or her rhythmic competence. Learning such rules of skill might be compared to a dancer working at the barre, or to a musician playing scales: it may seem ‘technical’ and pedantic, but artists who practice such techniques do not do so in order to quell or counter their own creativity. The hope is that, when inspiration strikes, these skills will be there to augment it.

## Chapter 5: Playing the Game

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Anatomical Approach, used in accordance with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game, this chapter documents my own application of the methodology to lines of Shakespearean verse<sup>79</sup>. The interpretations offered are not intended to be definitive or ‘correct’ prescriptions for other performers but, on the contrary, to serve as examples of how these principles and tools can lead to plausible, perceivable and playable choices that adhere to the constitutive rules of the game whilst remaining the ‘personalised’ interpretations of the performer.

Due to the level of detail involved in the discussion and analysis of the verse constructions, it has been necessary to focus on a small number of lines. With that in mind, the examples have been chosen to reflect particular challenges arising in the active interpretation of metrical dramatic verse. Lines from *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that might otherwise be regarded as serving ‘emotional’ or ‘lyrical’ functions are interpreted on the basis of their capacity to make a positive contribution to the action of the play. Examples drawn from *Othello* and *Macbeth* serve to demonstrate that shared lines need not be treated as ‘hidden’ instructions from the author nor as though they were a single phenomenon requiring a ‘one size fits all’ approach to their interpretation. Here, the lines are understood as presenting particular sets of rhythmical affordances

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<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that the effectiveness of the approach does not imply its ‘authenticity’. I aim to show that the Verse Psychology Game can be played successfully using Shakespeare’s text. At no point do I claim that to play the game in this way is ‘true’ to the intentions of the author or to the practices of the Elizabethan theatre.

that can be given active interpretations, which respond to the specific features of the construction within its dramatic context and do not necessitate fallacious appeals to authority. The final section of the chapter analyses a short excerpt from *Richard III* in which the apparently 'artificial' construction of an exchange between Richard and Lady Anne is shown to afford a series of plausible, perceivable and playable choices.

The demonstration of the methodology in this chapter serves a number of purposes within the development of the thesis:

- It illustrates that the Anatomical Approach can be an effective tool for the analysis of metrical dramatic verse.
- It legitimises the idea of composing verse in accordance with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game by showing that the use of these principles can lead to verse serving a positive dramatic function within the action of a play.
- It shows that the process of 'playing the game' can be used as a training tool in verse dramatists' efforts to 'sensitise' themselves to the performative potential of verse rhythm.
- It lays the foundations for a new approach to interpreting dramatic verse as part of the iterative and creative processes of embodied performance practice, giving credence to the idea that practitioners could incorporate the principles of the Verse Psychology Game into contemporary systems of actor-training and theatrical rehearsal.



## Chapter 6: Gaming the Play

In this chapter attention is turned to the practical possibilities of applying the principles of the Verse Psychology Game to the writing process. I argue that, in assuming the role of 'playwright-as-gamewright', I can make informed judgements about the dramatic value of my verse constructions and ensure that my own plausible and playable choices for the text are perceivable affordances of the lines. I further argue that the best way for me to assess and become 'sensitised' to the performative potential of metrical dramatic verse is to play the Verse Psychology Game with my own text as an integral part of the writing process.

I demonstrate the use of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor as a training tool by describing and documenting my own writing exercises. These involve composing and refining verse lines on the basis of psychophysical sensations, 'mimicking' Shakespearean constructions on the basis of the psychophysical sensations that they generate in me, composing variations on a given text in order to facilitate different psychophysical activities, and using the principles of the Anatomical Approach to challenge and develop my intuitive rhythmic competence.

I then document my own application of these principles within the creation of original material for a new work of verse drama. Focusing on two excerpts from my play *The Lady of the Lake*, I present two different ways of employing the methodologies of the Verse Psychology Game as part of the writing process. The first involves a process of planning, experimenting, reflecting and refining, so that

the metrical construction of lines is continually challenged, analysed and altered during the act of composition, with the result that my own creative choices 'emerge' out of an iterative cycle of 'question and answer'. The second involves a greater separation of the compositional and analytical phases of the process, so that material is composed on the basis of psychophysical sensations and only subjected to conscious analysis after the fact, thereby allowing more room for creative intuition whilst relying more heavily on the rhythmic competence of the writer. Both variations operate within the principles of the Verse Psychology Game and both are understood to be equally valid.

#### Epilogue: What's in a Game?

In the conclusion to the thesis I assess the success and the limitations of the new approach that has been developed to composing and analysing metrical dramatic verse and offer suggestions for further research. These include the possibilities of extending the system of textual analysis and composition, adapting the approach to the requirements of actor-training and professional rehearsal, and exploring the potential impact of hyperactive rhythmical performance on theatre audiences.

## Part One: Practice in Theory

### Chapter 1: Active Measures

#### 1.1 Why Verse? Why Not?

I first became interested in writing dramatic verse whilst training as an actor. It started with a homework exercise. My classmates and I were being introduced to the principles of verse-speaking and, in order to enhance our appreciation of the works that we were trying to get our heads and mouths around, we were instructed to go home that evening and try composing a line or two of our own. I arrived at school the next day – under-slept and over-caffeinated – with a notebook full of what were, in all likelihood, rather feeble ‘mighty lines’ and a sudden enthusiasm for the idea of writing plays in verse. I started writing speeches and then scenes, and, although upon graduating from the school I was fortunate enough to embark on a modestly successful acting career, I continued to write. And I continued to write in verse.

I soon became aware that not everyone shared my enthusiasm. A number of people found the idea of having new plays in verse quite exciting. Others were more sceptical. The question I was asked most often, both by those who seemed genuinely interested and by those who seemed rather eager to be dismissive, was, “Why verse?” Initially, I was happy enough to shrug my shoulders and say, “Why not?” But as time wore on, and as writing dramatic verse became, not

merely a hobby, but an important part of my professional creative practice, this question – why verse? – occupied my mind more and more. I knew that I felt passionately about it. I knew that dramatic verse did something to me – as a writer, as an actor, as an audience member – but quite what that was I found impossible to articulate. The paucity of new verse drama could be viewed as an opportunity – “if a poet were emboldened to take blank verse back to its dramatic roots, the field could hardly be more open”<sup>80</sup> – but was there any dramatic value in writing plays in verse in the twenty-first century? That was the real question. The desire to answer it came not only from intellectual curiosity (nor, indeed, only from the need for a better comeback) but from a simple, practical concern: I wanted to know how to get better at writing dramatic verse and in order to do that I needed a clearer sense of what ‘being better’ might entail.

There are no manuals for the contemporary verse dramatist. There are plenty of ‘how to’ guides for playwrights<sup>81</sup>, and plenty for poets<sup>82</sup> – and there is undoubtedly a great deal that an aspiring verse dramatist might glean from the advice contained therein – but no twenty-first century guides to writing dramatic verse as a discipline in its own right. Given that high profile productions of new, original verse plays have remained something of a rarity in recent decades<sup>83</sup>, this is perhaps unsurprising. Some such plays have been produced. Glyn Maxwell, for example, has had several new verse plays produced since the turn of the

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<sup>80</sup> Robert B. Shaw, *Blank Verse: A Guide to Its History and Use* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>81</sup> e.g. Stuart Spencer, *The Playwright’s Guidebook* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2002); Noël Greig, *Playwriting: A Practical Guide* (London: Routledge, 2004); Sam Smiley and Norman A Bert, *Playwriting: The Structure of Action* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> e.g. Peter Sansom, *Writing Poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1993); Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook* (San Diego: Harcourt Publishers, 1994); John Whitworth, *Writing Poetry* (London: A & C Black Publishers, 2006).

<sup>83</sup> Lyn Gardner, ‘Plays in Verse Were All the Rage, but Why Are They Missing from the Stage?’, *The Guardian*, 11 November 2011.

century<sup>84</sup>, Tony Harrison had a verse play on the stage of the National Theatre<sup>85</sup>, and, during the time that I have been working on this thesis, Mike Bartlett's verse play *King Charles III*<sup>86</sup> proved a hit in the West End and on Broadway<sup>87</sup>. The very fact that these plays exist – even if they are few and far between – might encourage the view that there is some hope for verse drama as a medium for creating new work. In themselves, however, they do not provide a clear set of principles for dramatic versification. If some of these plays can provide examples of 'good' (or 'bad') dramatic verse then what, beyond our intuitive responses, makes it 'good' and what, apart from the fact that it appears in the form of a play script, makes the verse dramatic? It may well be that these dramatists have their own theories and methodologies for making verse dramatic and their own sets of criteria for judging the success of their work, but, throughout my research, looking for published accounts from twenty-first century verse dramatists, providing an explicit, coherent and above all dramatic answer to the question, "why verse?" proved a fruitless task. Introducing his collection of verse plays, Maxwell comments that "they are written in verse not for reasons of aesthetics or culture or nostalgia, but because poets write in verse and a poet wrote these."<sup>88</sup> In itself, this is not much more informative than Christopher Fry's assertion, made in the

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<sup>84</sup> Glyn Maxwell, *Plays One* (London: Oberon Books, 2005).

<sup>85</sup> Tony Harrison, *Fram* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008).

<sup>86</sup> Mike Bartlett, *King Charles III* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> In the case of Bartlett's play there does seem to be a fairly clear answer to the question, 'why verse?' The piece is billed as a 'future history play' and Shakespearean allusions abound. The main function of the verse seems to be to reference the work of Shakespeare and to encourage us to view the contemporary monarchy in light of our impressions of the kings and queens of Shakespeare's history plays. The use of verse to draw deliberate comparisons with Shakespearean drama, particularly given the conceit of Bartlett's play, seems to me to be perfectly legitimate, but it does not provide an explanation as to how metrical verse serves a positive dramatic function in and of itself.

<sup>88</sup> Maxwell, *Plays One*, 9.

introduction to *The Lady's Not for Burning* half a century earlier, that the text is "written down this way because I find it convenient"<sup>89, 90</sup>

Aside from the lack of a clear argument in dramatic verse's favour, this also does little to explain why new verse drama is such a rarity. Did writing plays in verse simply go out of fashion or are there bigger issues to address? Perhaps one of the reasons for a lack of explicit arguments against new verse drama in the twenty-first century is that, with so little of it being written and produced, it is assumed that this argument has been made and accepted, or else that the disadvantages of metrical dramatic verse are so obvious that the points need not be raised. When attention is turned to critics of verse drama in the previous century, however, answers to my question "why not?" are more forthcoming.

## 1.2 Undramatic Verse

In assessing the merits of modern verse drama, Denis Donoghue offers the grim conclusion that "most good poets write plays, bad plays"<sup>91</sup>. Taken in isolation, this doesn't tell us why these plays should be considered bad plays. Are they 'bad plays' because they are written in verse or are they merely 'bad plays' that happen to be written in verse? And what is the relevance of their being written by poets? Is the fact that poets should write bad plays any more surprising than the idea that great sculptors might prove poor fashion designers? A tendency to regard verse

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<sup>89</sup> Christopher Fry, *The Lady's Not For Burning*, (Oxford University Press, 1951), v.

<sup>90</sup> It should be noted that Maxwell has since expanded on the explanation offered here. Some of his more recent comments are discussed in Section 1.4.

<sup>91</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 10.

drama as, primarily, a branch of poetry may well prove telling. If modern verse drama has been produced by poets “too little interested”<sup>92</sup> in the principles of drama, then perhaps there is no problem with metrical dramatic verse in and of itself, only with those who have tried to compose it. On the other hand, this could be a case of a bad tool blaming its workman. It may be true of any artistic medium that it only produces ‘good’ work in the hands of those who know how to use it, but the challenges for verse drama in the modern age seem to go deeper than that.

“The problem,” says Hinchliffe, “is one of naturalness”<sup>93</sup>. If by ‘naturalness’ one means ‘the replication of daily life’ then, on the surface of it, this criticism of dramatic verse seems difficult to refute. Most of us do not, as a rule, go around speaking in metrical verse. Hinchliffe goes on to note that “realism is lost if characters speak in verse”<sup>94</sup> and that “naturalism excludes the use of verse”<sup>95</sup>. He positions his observations in relation to Ibsen’s earlier rejection of dramatic verse in order to keep his dialogue, “as close to ordinary, everyday speech as possible”<sup>96</sup>. If one were to adopt the aim of creating dialogue that is a ‘realistic’ reflection of the way that most of us talk in our everyday lives, then the idea of using verse in dramatic dialogue is something of a nonstarter. However, I suggest that this aim applies to a very narrow dramatic style, and that it is perfectly legitimate to create work for the contemporary British theatre without striving to create the illusion of a realistic ‘slice of life’. As I have pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, contemporary theatre practitioners maintain a distinction

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<sup>92</sup> Arnold P. Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama* (London: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1977), 10.

<sup>93</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 4.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>96</sup> Henrik Ibsen, cited by Hinchliffe, *Ibid.*, 7.

between dramatic performance that is realistic and dramatic performance that is truthful. Playwrights such as Howard Barker, Edward Bond and Carol Churchill could hardly be said to replicate everyday life in their dramatic writing. Moreover, the early twenty-first century has seen an increased interest in ‘non-naturalistic’ “visceral performance”<sup>97</sup>, with companies such as Kneehigh, Punchdrunk and Frantic Assembly actively embracing heightened forms of theatricality. There might even be an argument to suggest that if ‘text-based’ theatre is to keep up with these trends then it needs to move further away from the ordinary speech of everyday life. In short, I do not take Hinchliffe’s criticism to be as damaging as it first appears. It is, I suggest, an obsolete argument, and I am willing to assume that metrical dramatic verse is unsuitable for works of Social Realism, whilst maintaining that this in itself does not render the use of such verse in contemporary playwriting inherently ‘untruthful’.

The flipside of Hinchliffe’s criticism is the notion that the heightened settings and narratives that are often associated with verse drama – myths and legends, for example – are “useless”<sup>98</sup> for modern playwrights. George Steiner’s suggestion that such stories have become “dead or spurious”<sup>99</sup> for modern audiences, seems to be contradicted, at least in the present day, by the success of companies such as Kneehigh, who have staged retellings of fairy tales such as *The Red Shoes* and legends such as *Tristan and Yseult*, by the appetite for myth seen in the recent *Greeks* season at the Almeida Theatre in London and by the immense popularity of films and television series such as the recent adaptations of *The Lord of the*

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<sup>97</sup> Josephine Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.

<sup>98</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 44.

<sup>99</sup> George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 329.



*Rings* and HBO's *Game of Thrones*, not to mention the futuristic versions of mythical storytelling found in science fiction. Countless arguments have been made for the ongoing relevance of myths, legends and fairy tales to the experiences of modern life<sup>100</sup>. Eliot's more troubling argument against mythical or historical settings for modern verse drama is that they create an environment, "far enough away from the present for the characters not to need to be recognisable as human beings, and therefore for them to be licenced to talk in verse"<sup>101</sup>. This, for a contemporary Stanislavskian theatre practitioner, hits a nerve.

The first thing to note is that, once again, there seems to be a confusion between theatrical realism and theatrical truth. Truth is not the sole preserve of "the mimetic representation of contemporary middle-class society"<sup>102</sup>. If one concedes that the use of metrical dramatic verse might be unsuited to strict Social Realism, but that by abandoning such 'realism' one does not abandon notions of dramatic truth, then a good portion of Eliot's argument might be swept aside quite casually. Characters speaking in verse is 'unrealistic' and so in order to justify the use of verse in drama one may require an 'unrealistic' setting and/or theatrical style. I am willing to accept this and embrace it. The characters' behaviour is not required to be 'recognisable' in the sense that it replicates daily behaviour, but it is required to be 'recognisable' in the sense of exhibiting dramatic truth: the behaviour must be

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<sup>100</sup> e.g. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993); Carl Gustav Jung, ed., *Man and His Symbols*, (New York: Turtleback Books, 1968); Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend* (Princeton University Press, 1998); Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991); James Hollis, *Tracking the Gods: Place of Myth in Modern Life* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1995); Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995); Edward F. Edinger, *The Eternal Drama: The Inner Meaning of Greek Mythology* (New York: Shambhala, 2001); Marina Warner, *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>101</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 76.

<sup>102</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Retreats from Realism in Recent English Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

‘experienced’ as ‘logical and coherent’ for these characters within their particular situation and environment. It is not enough, then, to suggest that a heightened setting and style “licences” characters to speak in verse; in order to be truthful, the verse must serve a logical and coherent purpose as part of the Interpersonal Action of the play.

This brings me to the issue that dominates this thesis: the use of metrical dramatic verse seems to be at odds within contemporary notions of dramatic action. The apparent failure of modern dramatists to reconcile verse to the demands of action is a constant refrain in the criticism offered by Donoghue and Hinchliffe. The lines in modern verse drama are, “passive”<sup>103</sup>, achieving an “autonomous poetic existence”<sup>104</sup> involving “motion but no action”<sup>105</sup> and “merely illustrating qualities in repose”<sup>106</sup>. Thus, modern dramatists are accused of using verse to “hold up rather than assist the action’s forward movement”<sup>107</sup>, or of creating “action which lapses into devices: arias, duets, choruses and invocations”<sup>108</sup>.

Francis Fergusson, drawing on concepts put forward by Cocteau, discusses the distinction between ‘poetry in the theatre’ and ‘poetry of the theatre’<sup>109</sup>. Put simply, poetry in the theatre may be thought of as non-dramatic poetry placed on stage, whereas poetry of the theatre is created by the flow of action through the drama. This form of theatre poetry is not primarily a poetry of words, and certainly not of

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<sup>103</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 45.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>107</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 30.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>109</sup> Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, 166.

words uttered for their own sake, but is “based upon the histrionic sensibility and the art of acting”<sup>110</sup>. It is precisely for their ability to create or facilitate poetry of the theatre that Fergusson praises playwrights such as Chekhov<sup>111</sup> and, indeed, this underpins Steiner’s view that if the lessons taught by Chekhov and Ibsen had been grasped earlier by British playwrights, then twentieth century attempts at creating verse drama – which he dismisses as “exercises in archaeology”<sup>112</sup> – might have been avoided altogether. If the use of dramatic verse does not contribute to dramatic action then it is, at best, superfluous to dramatic art. If it is allowed to disrupt or hinder the flow of dramatic action, then it becomes an obstacle to dramatic art. In other words, dramatic verse that serves only a ‘lyrical’ or ‘poetic’ purpose – that takes the form of poetry in the theatre – cannot be considered dramatic verse at all.

From the perspective of Stanislavskian theatre practice, in order for verse to contribute to dramatic action, it must contribute to the goal-directed actions and activities of dramatic characters. This is what the verse of twentieth century dramatists has been criticised for failing to do. Thus Donoghue accuses W. B. Yeats of creating verse that is “lyrical rather than dramatic”<sup>113</sup> and rebukes Christopher Fry for lacking “a feeling of those actions which demand enactment, not description”<sup>114</sup>. Kenneth Muir came to the conclusion that modern verse dramatists were “too little interested in human beings in action [and] never evolved verse which gave the illusion of one man speaking to another”<sup>115</sup>. Yeats does

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, 305.

<sup>113</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 46.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>115</sup> Cited in Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 10.

seem to offer a potential solution to the apparent ‘problem of action’: in the 1906 revision of his play *The Shadowy Waters*<sup>116</sup>, “prose is used for those parts of the dialogue which mirror the ‘merely’ human world, [whilst] the Higher Reality expresses itself only in verse”<sup>117</sup>. In other words, the action of the play is taken care of in prose and verse is brought in to serve a ‘poetic’ and ‘lyrical’ function at moments when the action is suspended. A similar technique will later be used by John Arden<sup>118</sup>. This seems more like an evasion than a solution to the challenges of making dramatic verse active, but then, according to Donoghue, Yeats’ main interest was not in action at all but in the use of poetry to “offer images of a *disembodied state* which represents the spirit or the soul”<sup>119</sup> (my italics). A ‘disembodied state’ could not be much further removed from the notion of embodied action. A similar interest in disembodied, spiritual truths over and above embodied, dramatic ones may be detected in the works of Christopher Fry<sup>120</sup>, and T. S. Eliot, for all his protests to the contrary<sup>121</sup>, ultimately confesses the opinion that dramatic verse only truly thrives when we set aside, “the motives of our conscious life when directed towards action – the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express”<sup>122</sup>. According to this view, verse comes to the fore at the exact moment when drama ceases to be dramatic.

This might lead us back to a consideration of whether these poets were really interested in drama at all. Hinchliffe warns us that many modern verse dramatists

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<sup>116</sup> William Butler Yeats, *Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan Pub Co, 1953), 140.

<sup>117</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 39.

<sup>118</sup> Cohn, *Retreats from Realism in Recent English Drama*, 75.

<sup>119</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 38.

<sup>120</sup> Frances Jessup, *Christopher Fry: A Dramatic Reassessment of the Fry/Eliot Era of British Verse Drama* (Dublin: Academica Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>121</sup> See section 1.3.

<sup>122</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 85.

seem to have written with “no thought of the stage”<sup>123</sup> and are guilty of “overlooking the fact that a play is not primarily a verbal medium: it is action”<sup>124</sup>. The question remains, however, as to what it might mean for verse to be active in the Stanislavskian sense and, indeed, whether an active use of verse is even possible in a contemporary context. If the qualities ascribed to text written in verse, dramatic or otherwise, tend to be to do with lyricism and description and emotional expression rather than action, then is verse inherently undramatic? If so, how did the great dramatists of the past manage to use it successfully? One answer to this last question might be that dramatic action, as understood by theatre practitioners of the twentieth century and twenty-first century, is based on a conception of the human subject and on notions of dramatic character that cannot – or perhaps should not – be applied to works from an earlier age.

To ascribe actions and activities to a dramatic character is to assume that it is appropriate to treat and discuss that character as if he or she were a ‘real person’ – not, as I hope to have made clear, in the sense of being a ‘realistic’ person necessarily, but in the sense of being a conscious agent, with psychological motivations and desires, capable of intentional, goal-directed behaviour, regardless of the style in which this fictional person is presented. This is what Jonathan Culpeper calls a “humanising approach”<sup>125</sup> to character and this is the way in which many people today are used to engaging with fictional characters, whether those characters appear on stage, on screen or in the pages of a novel. As Catherine Emmott says, “we

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<sup>123</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 17.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>125</sup> Jonathan Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 6.

imagine worlds inhabited by individuals who can be assumed to behave, physically and psychologically, in ways which reflect our real-life experiences of being situated in the real world”<sup>126</sup>. Or, as Culpeper puts it, “humanising characters is part of most people’s appreciation of literature”<sup>127</sup>.

Culpeper notes that, throughout much of the twentieth century, the dominant approaches to character within literary theory can be described as “de-humanising approaches” in which the attitude is to “deny that characters are human and to insist that they have a purely textual existence”<sup>128</sup>. Thus we find the “actantial model of structural semantics”<sup>129</sup> in which characters (‘actants’) are regarded as no more than functions of narrative, and Roland Barthes telling us that, when we consider a character, it is a mistake to attempt to “take him off the page in order to turn him into a psychological character (endowed with possible motives)”<sup>130</sup>. Nevertheless, taking text ‘off the page’ in order to present ‘psychological’ characters ‘endowed with motives’ is precisely the approach of Stanislavskian actors. Whilst such notions have been challenged by, for example, the playwright David Mamet (“There is no character. There are only lines upon a page.”<sup>131</sup>) and by postmodernist commentators such as Elinor Fuchs, who reject the “idea of autonomous character”<sup>132</sup> and “consider psychology obsolete”<sup>133</sup>,

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<sup>126</sup> Catherine Emmott, *Narrative Comprehension: A Discourse Perspective*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>127</sup> Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation*, 7.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Velie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

<sup>130</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc, 1991), 178.

<sup>131</sup> David Mamet, *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), 9.

<sup>132</sup> Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism*, Drama and Performance Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>133</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 3.

humanising approaches to character have dominated western theatre practice throughout what has been called the “Long Stanislavskian Century”<sup>134</sup>. Put simply, most of us – as practitioners, readers and audience members – continue to humanise characters “whatever the theorists keep telling us”<sup>135</sup>.

I would like to suggest that, in fact, most contemporary theatre practitioners adopt what Culpeper calls a “mixed approach”<sup>136</sup>; acknowledging that “the extreme humanising view, that characters are actually real people, is, of course, naïve”<sup>137</sup> whilst also acknowledging that “what we all do when we watch a play or a film is to attempt to *interpret* characters with the structures and processes which we use to interpret our real-life experiences of people”<sup>138</sup> (original emphasis). The assumption is that to humanise dramatic characters is a legitimate act of imaginative interpretation, as long as one stops short of treating such characters as actual people who really do have some sort of independent existence that might contradict or override the textual evidence of lines on a page.

There is, however, a further consideration and one that has particular relevance to a discussion of verse drama. Stanislavskian understandings of dramatic character can be traced to understandings of human psychology,

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<sup>134</sup> Cary M. Mazer, *Double Shakespeares: Emotional-Realist Acting and Contemporary Performance* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 54.

<sup>135</sup> Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1988), 92.

<sup>136</sup> Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation*, 9–12.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

behaviour and experience that would not have existed in the pre-modern world. The application of his system of acting has been linked to insights gained from the work of Freud, Pavlov and Ribot<sup>139</sup>. This means that, even if it is appropriate to adopt a broadly humanising approach to dramatic character and action when dealing with modern drama, it may still be considered questionable to apply psychological principles to works from earlier periods. Edward Burns discusses the distinction between “substantive and transactional modes of character”<sup>140</sup> with Stanislavsky’s approach considered “the ‘substantive’ idea of character in its fullest translation”<sup>141</sup>. He argues that writers such as Shakespeare and his contemporaries would not have been working with ‘substantive’ notions of dramatic character and that to approach the characters of such plays from a Stanislavskian perspective can therefore be regarded as “anachronistic”<sup>142</sup>.

As Burns himself notes, this has not discouraged contemporary theatre practitioners from taking a humanising approach to Shakespearean characters. Referencing A. C. Bradley<sup>143</sup>, the literary scholar whose habit of ‘psychologising’ Shakespeare was famously mocked by L.C. Knights<sup>144</sup>, Burns tells us that contemporary Shakespearean actors are “Bradleyans to a man or woman”<sup>145</sup>. This may not be entirely true. Proponents of ‘Original

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<sup>139</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Pitches, *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>140</sup> Edward Burns, *Character: Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 227.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>143</sup> Andrew Cecil Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>144</sup> Lionel Charles Knights, *Hamlet and Other Shakespearean Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 270–308.

<sup>145</sup> Burns, *Character*, 222.



Practice' such as Tiffany Stern<sup>146</sup> and Patrick Tucker<sup>147</sup> seek to study and emulate the methods of rehearsal and performance undertaken by Shakespeare's company: methods at odds with Stanislavskian rehearsal processes and 'psychological' explorations of 'substantive' character<sup>148</sup>. Nevertheless, the desire to link Shakespearean performance to Stanislavskian acting techniques is given clear expression in John Barton's aim of "marrying the two traditions". Stanislavsky himself applied his system to Shakespearean plays and characters<sup>149</sup>, and contemporary exponents of his work such as Merlin<sup>150</sup> and Benedetti<sup>151</sup> are keen to do the same.

This ongoing tradition of approaching Shakespearean texts from a Stanislavskian perspective fuels my own desire to explore such verse through the lens of contemporary notions of action-playing. My contention is not that 'anti-Stanislavskian' approaches to Shakespeare are invalid, but that, as my aim is to understand how the use of verse in twenty-first century playwriting can contribute to dramatic action, approaches linking verse-speaking and action-playing are likely to be the most useful to me. In other words, my concern is not with the 'authenticity' of Stanislavskian approaches to Shakespeare, but their effectiveness.

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<sup>146</sup> Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>147</sup> Patrick Tucker, *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare: The Original Approach* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>148</sup> See, for example, Tiffany Stern, '(Re:)Historicising Spontaneity: Original Practices, Stanislavski and Characterisation' in Yu Jin Ko and Michael W. Shurgot, eds., *Shakespeare's Sense of Character* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012), 99–110.

<sup>149</sup> e.g. Constantin Stanislavski, *Stanislavski Produces Othello*, trans. Helen Nowak (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1963).

<sup>150</sup> e.g. Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 92–95.

<sup>151</sup> e.g. Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, 110–30.

However, there is evidence to suggest that, even amongst those who share my Stanislavskian sympathies, the principles of his 'system' are applied with less rigour to Shakespearean texts than they might be to modern ones; or, rather, that Shakespeare's text is not always expected to be particularly well-suited to a Stanislavskian approach. Barton, for example, is happy to accept that certain speeches within Shakespearean scenes are "choric"<sup>152</sup> – that is, the lines have little to do with the actions of the character and are included for the purposes of giving information or describing events for the benefit of the audience – something that a strict Stanislavskian approach might seek to reject and that a modern writer may well be criticised for. Despite Stanislavsky's clear instruction that "on the stage there cannot be, under any circumstances, action that is directed immediately at the arousing of a feeling for its own sake"<sup>153</sup>, Shakespeare's verse is frequently described in terms of emotional qualities without reference to any active purpose it might serve. The director William Gaskill says that, "actioning is more valuable in the dialogue of a contemporary play"<sup>154</sup> than in Shakespeare, and suggests that when he has watched actors try to take such an approach to dramatic verse the result was always that "the poetry had gone"<sup>155</sup>. We even find Simon Callow – himself a Drama Centre graduate – admitting that he doesn't find it useful to apply Stanislavsky to Shakespeare, whose text "cannot be coerced into the activity-towards-an-action straightjacket"<sup>156</sup>.

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<sup>152</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, 59.

<sup>153</sup> Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 40–41.

<sup>154</sup> William Gaskill, *Words Into Action: Finding the Life of the Play* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), 56.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Simon Callow, *Being an Actor* (London: Random House, 2004), 86.

Eliot suggests that Elizabethan audiences were prepared to “stand a good deal of poetry”<sup>157</sup>. On this evidence it seems that contemporary audiences – or at least contemporary practitioners – are prepared to ‘stand’ a good deal of poetry too when it comes to Shakespeare’s work, even at the expense of the rigorous pursuit of dramatic action and even if they refuse to make similar concessions when dealing with the texts of modern playwrights. If twentieth century verse dramatists failed to create texts in which “the words spoken lead directly to character and action and never stop to admire themselves”<sup>158</sup> and if modern notions of characters in action can only be applied to texts such as Shakespeare’s in a manner that is, to borrow Gaskill’s description, “vague and woolly”<sup>159</sup>, then it remains an open question as to whether there are any verse texts to which Stanislavskian concepts of action-playing may be properly applied or to which we might turn for clear examples of what active verse looks, feels and sounds like.

For the contemporary verse dramatist this is all rather worrying. If the ‘problem’ with dramatic verse is that it fails to match the conventions of Social Realism, then the solution is simple: don’t use verse to write a work of Social Realism. If the issue is that the use of verse requires abandoning or, at the very least, compromising one’s commitment to contemporary understandings of dramatic action then the ‘problem’ sticks deep. For a Stanislavskian practitioner, action is not simply a matter of the style in which drama is presented, it is a matter of what drama is. One response to this apparent difficulty would be to stop trying to write

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<sup>157</sup> Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 70.

<sup>158</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 74.

<sup>159</sup> Gaskill, *Words Into Action*, 56.

dramatic verse at all. This seems to be what the vast majority of contemporary dramatists has done. (Or, more accurately, most contemporary dramatists seem never to have started trying to write dramatic verse in the first place.) Another response would be to keep writing dramatic verse but accept that such verse has little or nothing to contribute to the Interpersonal Action of a play and may, on occasion, obstruct it. One might even adopt some kind of “postdramatic”<sup>160</sup> ideology within which principles of “dramatic action formerly central to theatre no longer apply”<sup>161</sup> (Though one might note that proponents of postdramatic theatre have also been keen to reject “poetic theatre”<sup>162</sup> as a form of ‘literary drama’ belonging to the past.)

What, though, if one is determined, as I am, to write metrical verse for a dramatic form of theatre that seeks to create a continuous flow of embodied, goal-directed actions carried out in specific ways for specific purposes by substantive dramatic characters? What is required, it seems, is a new theory of dramatic versification in which verse and action are regarded as inseparable. In answer to this requirement, only one twentieth century dramatist working in the English language provides a coherent account of his efforts to reconcile the use of dramatic verse to the demands of the modern theatre. T. S. Eliot offers “the most complete attempt to construct a theory of [verse] drama since Dryden”<sup>163</sup> and without his work, Hinchliffe tells us, “it would not be necessary to treat the subject of verse drama in our modern period seriously”<sup>164</sup>. It is to Eliot’s approach that I turn now.

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<sup>160</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>163</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 38.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

### 1.3 A Negative Attitude

In examining Eliot's theory of dramatic versification, my aim is to explore the key principles of his approach and to assess how useful these ideas might be in addressing the challenges of verse drama in the twenty-first century. It is not my aim to determine whether Eliot wrote 'good' or 'bad' plays or to assess the overall 'quality' of his verse. For a thorough discussion of Eliot's plays and of the verse within them, I direct the reader to Donoghue, who dedicates several chapters of *The Third Voice* to Eliot's dramatic writing<sup>165</sup>, to the relevant section of Hinchliffe's study of verse drama in the modern age<sup>166</sup> and to Carol H. Smith's book which focuses exclusively on Eliot's work as a dramatist<sup>167</sup>. It should also be noted that the attention I give to Eliot is not intended to imply that his plays are, in themselves, 'better' or more worthy of study than those of other verse dramatists but is a reflection of the fact that he, unlike other playwrights of the period, attempted to put forward a coherent theory of dramatic versification with the explicit aim of informing the practice of future dramatists.

Eliot's attitude to verse drama is, in at least one important respect, at odds with the arguments advanced in this thesis. He expresses the view that "if the poetic drama is to reconquer its place, it must, in my opinion, enter into overt competition with prose drama"<sup>168</sup> by which he means that audiences should be "made to hear [dramatic verse] from people dressed like ourselves, living in houses and apartments like ours, and using telephones and motor cars and radio sets"<sup>169</sup>. He

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<sup>165</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 76–179.

<sup>166</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 37–52.

<sup>167</sup> Carol H. Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice* (Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>168</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 79.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

hopes “to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre”<sup>170</sup>. In short, his aim is the “adaption of verse and idiom to the requirements of modern realistic theatre”<sup>171</sup>. There is reason to suppose that he remains uneasy with this aim. He expresses his distaste for theatre, or for any art, that “ends its course in the desert of exact likeness to the reality which is perceived by the most commonplace mind”<sup>172</sup>. He wants to explore through his plays, “the dilemma of the spiritually aware individual forced to exist in a world unaware of spiritual reality”<sup>173</sup>. The apparent difficulty of expressing such ‘spiritual truths’ within the conventions of a theatrical style that he sees as emphasising “the ephemeral and superficial”<sup>174</sup> aspects of “our own sordid, dreary daily world,”<sup>175</sup> leads to some interesting contradictions within Eliot’s theatrical ideology. Eliot’s reasons for assuming that more heightened theatrical settings and styles absolved the playwright of a responsibility to dramatic truth, and my own reasons for assuming otherwise, have been discussed. It is, however, useful to highlight this divergence at the outset of this discussion of Eliot’s approach because many of his opinions regarding the ways in which verse might be used on the modern stage are shaped by this self-imposed restriction.

On a more positive note, Eliot takes the challenges of writing dramatic verse in a manner that is compatible with modern theatre practice seriously and a good deal of what he has to say relates to the issue of action and to the dangers of verse that is either extraneous to or an obstacle for the actions of dramatic characters:

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Subhas Sarkar, *T. S. Eliot The Dramatist* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2006), 176.

<sup>172</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 93.

<sup>173</sup> Smith, *T. S. Eliot’s Dramatic Theory and Practice*, 12.

<sup>174</sup> Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 34.

<sup>175</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 79.

For I start with the assumption that if poetry is merely a decoration, an added embellishment, if it merely gives people of literary tastes the pleasure of listening to poetry at the same time that they are witnessing a play, then it is superfluous. It must justify itself dramatically, and not merely be fine poetry shaped into dramatic form. From this it follows that no play should be written in verse for which prose is *dramatically* adequate. And from this it follows, again, that the audience, its attention held by the dramatic action, its emotions stirred by the situation between the characters, should be too intent upon the play to be wholly conscious of the medium. Whether we use prose or verse on the stage, they are both but means to an end.<sup>176</sup> (original emphasis)

This initial statement of intent seems entirely commensurate with the aim of forging a link between the use of verse on stage and the pursuit of dramatic action, whatever the setting or theatrical style of the piece. Further encouragement is offered by Eliot's desire to create verse plays in which, "nothing is superfluous, and there is no line of poetry which is not justified by its dramatic value"<sup>177</sup> and his insistence that, "every line must be judged by a new law, that of dramatic relevance"<sup>178</sup>.

The difficulty with Eliot's approach, however, is that he fails to identify a clear and explicit positive dramatic function for the verse in its relationship to the action of a play. He suggests, for example, that verse comes into its own when the drama,

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 76.

“has reached such a point of intensity that poetry becomes the only natural utterance, because then it is the only language in which the emotions can be expressed at all”<sup>179</sup>. The expression of emotion, however intense that emotion might be, is not active in and of itself. As has been noted, Stanislavsky is quite clear in his view that ‘feeling for feeling’s sake’ cannot be excused on the modern stage<sup>180</sup>. The question for the performer is, does the expression of these feelings serve the action of the play? The answer appears to be no. The advantage verse (or poetry) has over prose, Eliot suggests, is its ability to express aspects of experience “which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of our eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary *detachment from action*.”<sup>181</sup> (My italics.) The kind of human experience in which attention is “directed towards action” is, in Eliot’s view, “the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express”<sup>182</sup>. Herein lies the difficulty. Eliot subscribes to the idea that drama is made up of the action between characters. He further suggests that no play should be written in verse for which prose is dramatically adequate. However, if prose is wholly adequate to deal with action then, according to this argument, prose is wholly adequate for drama. It therefore remains a mystery as to how verse can make a dramatic contribution to a play or, indeed, how its use in drama can be justified at all. Eliot seems to have created a trap in which verse comes into its own only when it contradicts his own law of dramatic relevance.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>180</sup> Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 40.

<sup>181</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 85.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.



This leads me to suggest that Eliot's theory provides only a negative account of how verse might be made compatible with modern principles of dramatic action. It appears that the primary task of the verse dramatist is not to create verse that contributes to action, but verse that avoids getting in the way. He suggests that, "the self-education of a poet trying to write for the theatre seems to require a long period of disciplining his poetry, and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet in order to adapt it for the needs of the stage"<sup>183</sup>. The outcome of taking this attitude is highlighted in Eliot's own assessment of *The Cocktail Party*: "I had laid down for myself the ascetic rule to avoid poetry which could not stand the test of strict dramatic utility: with such success, indeed, that it is perhaps an open question as to whether there is any poetry in the play at all"<sup>184</sup>. This has led to the assessment that, "in learning the mechanics of the theatre and the management of intrigue, Eliot lost his touch with poetry completely."<sup>185</sup> His hope that, "later, when (and if) the understanding of theatrical technique has become second nature, [the playwright] can dare to make more liberal use of poetry"<sup>186</sup> only begs the question as to what the dramatic function of this poetry will be when it is used more liberally. One might suggest that, if verse dramatists learn to keep the verse in check most of the time, then this might excuse the odd poetic interlude. But this only returns us to the idea, rejected by Eliot, of audiences "putting up with a suspension of the action in order to enjoy a poetic fantasia"<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>185</sup> Dushiant Kumar Rampal, *Poetic Theory and Practice of T. S. Eliot* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1996), 245.

<sup>186</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 84.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 80.

The discussion of dramatic verse as poetry should not, however, be allowed to obliterate the discussion of dramatic verse as verse. From the perspective of this thesis, the 'poetic' quality of the dialogue, or the lack thereof, is relatively unimportant. What matters are the dramatic possibilities of text written in metre. In other words, if the verse as verse is serving a positive dramatic function then the fact that the language of the drama is 'prosaic' is of little consequence.

Unfortunately, Eliot's approach hits difficulties here as well. He starts from the assumption that if an audience is to focus on the action of the play it cannot be wholly conscious of the form in which the text is written<sup>188</sup>. However, this assumption shifts and we are presented with the idea that the effects of the verse must be "unconscious"<sup>189</sup>. There is a significant difference between dramatic verse that avoids drawing so much attention to itself that its presence distracts from the action of the play – though this, in itself, suggests that verse and action are separate considerations – and verse that is so 'unobtrusive' that it cannot be consciously appreciated as verse at all.

In his efforts to present audiences with dramatic verse that might affect them "without their being conscious of it"<sup>190</sup>, Eliot shuns accentual-syllabic metres such as iambic pentameter in favour of an accentual verse form. His aim is:

To find a rhythm close to contemporary speech, in which the stresses could be made to come wherever we should naturally put them in uttering the particular phrase on the particular occasion. What I worked out is substantially what I have

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 71.

continued to employ: a line of varying length and varying number of syllables, with a caesura and three stresses. The caesura and the stresses come at different places, almost anywhere in the line; the stresses may be close together or well separated by light syllables; the only rule being that there must be one stress on one side of the caesura and two on the other.<sup>191</sup>

Examples include:

This is what matters, | but it is unspeakable

(The Family Reunion, 1.1)<sup>192</sup>

The sudden extinction | of every alternative

(The Family Reunion, 1.2)<sup>193</sup>

And I shall prepare you | a nice little dinner

(The Cocktail Party, 1.1)<sup>194</sup>

So ‘loose’ are the demands of this form – one might point out that if the line involves three stresses and a caesura then Eliot’s ‘only rule’ of having one stress on one side of the caesura and two on the other is less of a ‘rule’ than a logical necessity – that Donoghue questions whether it can be considered ‘metrical’ at all; suggesting that, “Eliot’s verse line has the advantages and disadvantages of being ‘free’”<sup>195</sup>. I submit that Eliot’s suggested form is still accentual metre and that his

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>192</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Faber & Faber, 2004), 235.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>195</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 173.

plays can therefore be included in a discussion of metrical dramatic verse.

Donoghue, however, is quite right in pointing out the sacrifices involved in electing to use a verse form that comes as close to free verse as Eliot's:

One of the characteristics of his verse line is that its accentual nature avoids any conflict, such as we find with the great expressiveness in the blank verse of Shakespeare and of Milton, between a *theoretical* metrical pattern and an *actual* pattern of rendered sound. Such conflicts and their expressive resources are available only where the metrical norm exists as a putative, regular pattern: when this happens, departures from the norm, and acts of violence within in, become momentous... Consequently, Eliot's verse line cannot utilise the "promotions" or "suppressions" of the stress levels of normal speech possible by means of the pressure of an established metrical pattern.<sup>196</sup> (original emphasis)

Eliot, however, was not after 'momentous' deviations from or within a strict metrical pattern. Such moments would inevitably call attention to themselves and the whole point of adopting this subtle accentual form was to avoid making an audience consciously aware of the verse as verse. Moreover, Eliot seems to have been successful in achieving this goal. Hinchliffe tells us that, when it comes to Eliot's drama, "it is difficult to hear what is in verse or not"<sup>197</sup> – which is, presumably, what Eliot wanted. D. E. Jones describes the results of this approach as being "only just across the border from prose"<sup>198</sup>, whereas Hinchliffe suggests that the plays might be regarded as, "written in prose printed as verse"<sup>199</sup> and notes that, "telling the

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>197</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 50.

<sup>198</sup> David Edwards Jones, *Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul PLC, 1960), 178.

<sup>199</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 2.

audience that the verse was unobtrusive was hardly the strongest recommendation for verse drama”<sup>200</sup>.

Eliot declares: “No poet has begun to master dramatic verse until he can write lines which... are *transparent*”<sup>201</sup> (original emphasis). He makes this remark in considering the opening scene of *Hamlet* and his point is that when this scene is performed we are not focusing on the verse itself, but on “the frosty night, the officers keeping watch on the battlement, and the foreboding of an ominous action”<sup>202</sup>. What I suggest might be misleading, or perhaps unhelpful, is his choice of metaphor: transparency. The meaning is ‘clear’. The implication is that the verse is like a pane of glass: we look straight through it to the meaning of the words and the action of the play. The window by my desk is transparent. So, the street, the houses and the cars that I can see through my window are, in Eliot’s terms, playing the part of the action and the window is acting the role of the verse. The window is doing a good job because it is not interfering very much at all with my ability to see what’s going on outside. This seems to fit with what Eliot is saying about the lines from *Hamlet*.

‘Being transparent’, however, is a passive activity. It isn’t really an activity at all. The window just is transparent. It may at some point become less transparent. It may get dirty. A dirty window is ‘doing a bad job’ of being transparent and if my aim is to see what is going on outside then I’ll need to clean it and return it to its

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>201</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 71.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

previous state. There may, however, be occasions on which I want to obscure my view of the outside world, or the outside world's view of me. On such occasions I can pull the blind and get up to whatever I like, safe in the knowledge that no one on the other side of the window can see me. The same might be true of the verse: when we want to we can make it 'less transparent', even 'opaque'. The question is, when would we want to do that? When I pull the blinds, I no longer want to look at the outside world; I want to have some privacy. In Eliot's metaphor, the outside world is the action of the play. We always want to see the action of the play. Any attempt to obscure the view would, therefore, have to be regarded as 'undramatic'.

It may seem churlish to make so much out of Eliot's choice of metaphor, but there is reason to suppose that unpicking Eliot's concept of 'transparency; – which he also used to explain his approach to versification in a letter to Ezra Pound<sup>203</sup> – may go a long way to understanding the difficulties in his theory of verse drama. Lakoff and Johnson tell us that, whilst "metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action"<sup>204</sup> it plays a much more important role in our understanding of things than we might imagine: "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature."<sup>205</sup> Metaphor is not just a way of describing something, it is a way of "*understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another*"<sup>206</sup> (original emphasis). By thinking in terms of a particular metaphor, we are both highlighting and hiding certain aspects of the "target

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<sup>203</sup> Cited in Jones, *Plays of T. S. Eliot*, 11.

<sup>204</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 3.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 5.

domain”<sup>207</sup> (in Eliot’s case, the function of verse in drama). As Lakoff and Johnson say, “in allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept, a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor”<sup>208</sup>. They use as an example the conceptual metaphor ‘argument is war’, by which we understand expressions such as “your claims are *indefensible*” and “he *attacked every weak point* in my argument”<sup>209</sup>. Lakoff and Johnson tell us that we don’t just talk about argument in terms of war; we understand it and experience it in those terms. But argument doesn’t have to be a war: “Someone who is arguing with you can be viewed as giving you his time, a valuable commodity, in an effort at mutual understanding. But when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the cooperative aspects.”<sup>210</sup>

By examining the ‘dramatic verse is a window’ metaphor, the contradiction in Eliot’s conception of dramatic versification becomes apparent. If we understand the dramatic function of verse in his terms, the verse must never do anything active enough for us to become conscious of it; as soon as it does, it ceases to fulfil its function, which is to let us see what is on the other side of it. Eliot did not believe that his ‘transparent’ verse was as passive as I have been describing it. His assumption seems to be that, although the verse may go unnoticed and could, therefore, be mistaken for being passive, it continues to have a series of unconscious effects on the audience. The difficulty here is that Eliot never tells us

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<sup>207</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 58.

<sup>208</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by*, 10.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

precisely what those unconscious effects are meant to be or how they might relate to the action of the drama.

From a twenty-first century perspective, the idea of verse having ‘unconscious’ effects on an audience may be called into question. Eliot wanted to “avoid forming in the theatre-audience any special frame of mind such as attends on the experience of listening to a poetry recital”<sup>211</sup>. According to Reuven Tsur, who pioneered the study of cognitive poetics<sup>212</sup>, a ‘special frame of mind’ is required if we are to be affected by poetry and verse in a manner that distinguishes such language from prose. Tsur posits the idea of a “poetic mode of speech perception”<sup>213</sup>; a mode of listening in which we balance listening purely for information or sense (as we do with normal speech) and listening for sound qualities (as we do when listening to non-speech). This ‘poetic mode’ requires the sounds and rhythms of verse to be obtrusive enough for us to be conscious of them without being so obtrusive that they become the centre of our attention. Tsur’s research suggests that if we follow Eliot in making dramatic verse ‘unobtrusive’ to the point that audiences are no longer conscious of it, then the result may be to ensure that the verse as verse has no meaningful impact on the audience whatsoever.

My interest here is not in criticising Eliot’s plays, but in pointing out the difficulties within his theory of dramatic versification, from the perspective of a contemporary

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<sup>211</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 170.

<sup>212</sup> Reuven Tsur, *A Perception-Oriented Theory of Metre* (Porter Israeli Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University, 1977).

<sup>213</sup> Reuven Tsur, *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive?: The Poetic Mode of Speech Perception* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992), 2.



dramatist. My aim is to understand how the use of verse might make a positive contribution to dramatic action and Eliot's theory fails to provide a coherent explanation. Unless verse serves an active dramatic function then Eliot's law of dramatic relevance – which would be just as applicable to writing in prose – can only inform the use of verse in a negative sense, alerting the writer to the dangers of making verse superfluous to action but offering no sense of how verse might be used to contribute to action. Moreover, if verse isn't contributing to the action then, even if 'transparent', it is still superfluous from a dramatic point of view. It is just less noticeably so.

In discussing Shakespeare's use of verse, however, Eliot suggests that, "it never interrupts the action, or is out of character, but, on the contrary, in some mysterious way supports both action and character... it is *dramatic* poetry: that is, it does not interrupt but intensifies the dramatic situation"<sup>214</sup> (original emphasis). The idea that verse supports action and character in a way that intensifies the drama is very welcome indeed from my perspective. The question is, what does that mean? And, how exactly does verse do that? For Eliot, the ways remain 'mysterious'. Tsur's aim in advancing the study of cognitive poetics is to allow discussion of the effects of verse and poetry to move beyond a reliance on "mysterious intuitions"<sup>215</sup>. Of course, Tsur's research was not available to Eliot. The implication is not that Eliot ought to have taken the cognitive effects of verse rhythm into account, but that Tsur's findings provide further reason for me, as a contemporary verse dramatist, to treat Eliot's approach with caution.

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<sup>214</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 80–81.

<sup>215</sup> Tsur, *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive?*, 3.

There is, however, another potential route to a clearer understanding of verse in relation to action, and this route would have been available to Eliot. Action is something that dramatic characters do. Action is therefore something that actors do. It makes sense, then, to examine the active role of verse by exploring the ways in which actors might use it in performance. Eliot, however, takes rather a dim view of actors.

#### 1.4 Advice from the Players

Eliot warns that any art form which “depends upon representation by performers”<sup>216</sup> is bound to run into difficulties:

A struggle, more or less unconscious, between the creator and the interpreter is almost inevitable. The interest of the performer is almost certain to be centred on himself: a very slight acquaintance with actors and musicians will testify... The conflict is one which certainly cannot be terminated by the utter rout of the actor profession. For one thing, the stage appeals to too many demands besides the demand for art for that to be possible; and also we need, unfortunately, something more than refined automatons. Occasionally, attempts have been made to ‘get around’ the actor, to envelop him in masks, to set up a few ‘conventions’ for him to stumble over, or even to develop little breeds of actors for some special Art drama. This meddling with nature seldom succeeds...<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 57.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–58.

If Eliot's opinion of actors is justified then this is, to say the least, rather unfortunate. Eliot's hope, or any verse dramatist's hope for that matter, of affecting a theatre audience through the use of verse is contingent on the fact that the text must be spoken and acted on stage. If the inevitable consequence of allowing actors near a play is that they will ruin it with their performances, then the whole business of writing plays for performance seems to be a fool's errand. However, Hinchliffe notes that, unlike verse dramatists such as Eliot, "many of the best dramatists writing after 1956 started their careers as actors – John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Henry Livings, Charles Wood – and it has had an effect on their writing. It must have directed their attention to what happens in the theatre as well as words"<sup>218</sup>. He goes on to claim that these playwrights, again, unlike verse dramatists such as Eliot, showed an awareness of "the fact that a play is not primarily a verbal medium: it is action, indicated by words and gestures spoken by an actor"<sup>219</sup>. This suggests that, *pace* Eliot, dramatists might be better off engaging with the acting process rather than thinking of the actor as an obstacle to 'get around'.

Glyn Maxwell, expanding considerably on the idea that his plays are written in verse "because poets write in verse and a poet wrote these"<sup>220</sup>, dedicates a section of his book *On Poetry* to his explorations of verse drama. He acknowledges that he leaves a great deal unsaid about the art of dramatic writing and that his thoughts on dramatic verse belong to "a poet's book and a book about

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<sup>218</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 74.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> Maxwell, *Plays One*, 9.

poets”<sup>221</sup> rather than to a full consideration of drama as drama: “What I know about the making of a play, the arcs, the aesthetics, the character-journeys – I was going to say that would take a different book. But it wouldn’t, it would scarcely fill a page, what very little I’m sure about on that score.”<sup>222</sup> Whilst Maxwell is undoubtedly being modest, it is true that the insights offered in *On Poetry* have less to say about the practical dramatic considerations of versification than one, in addressing the concerns of this thesis, might hope. His suggestion that verse is suited to drama because it is “creaturely”<sup>223</sup> has relevance to the discussion of ‘unrealistic’, experiential truth and is used to justify his dismissal of those:

...Dull voices [that] ever burble *verse isn’t natural, metre’s not authentic, rhyme isn’t real*. Perhaps people who think that way somehow believe that four hundred years ago we really did speak in high pentameters and complex metaphors dreamed up on the spot, or rhyme as we left the room, leaving some vagabonds and clowns to clatter in and swap incomprehensible prose riddles while we powdered our noses.<sup>224</sup> (original emphasis)

The association of verse drama with a kind of ‘creaturely’ experience that is beyond or other than ‘realistic’ presentations of daily life finds parallels in Raphael Lyne’s assertion, in studying the cognitive underpinnings of Shakespearean rhetoric, that, “people don’t talk like this; but they may think like it”<sup>225</sup>. Such notions

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<sup>221</sup> Glyn Maxwell, *On Poetry* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 131.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 130–31.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 133. In using the term “creaturely”, Maxwell suggests that we connect with poetry on an ‘animalistic’, primal level; that verse captures and echoes the rhythms of the pulse and the breath, and that the ‘truth’ of poetry is experienced in “the gut, the lungs, the windpipe” (*Ibid.*)

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 27.

of 'truth' are valuable, but they only become dramatic truths if they are linked to action. Otherwise they are no different to Eliot's desire to express emotional and spiritual experiences without reference to any dramatic function. Sadly, Maxwell does not discuss action explicitly, but he does discuss the importance of actors. He recounts an anecdote about a rehearsal for one of his plays in which one of the actors suggested that an entire speech might be cut:

When actors ask for *fewer* lines you know they're dead serious. And if you're new to this, and you think you're the only maker here, you try to stare that down: it's not your character it's mine, so I know, so there. But you don't, because, poet, now that the words are passing through the souls of actors, *you're* new to the play too, and someone who has trained about a thousand times harder than you and in the company of some of the best English ever written is telling you what she knows, what he knows, what their bodies know about English. Know as much as they do; only then can you stare them down.<sup>226</sup> (original emphasis)

This respect for, and deference to, the embodied understanding of the actor offers a stark contrast to the attitude of Eliot. What, though, if verse dramatists, rather than simply accepting their place as 'poets', take Maxwell at his word and try to know what the actor knows, to know what the actor's body knows, about the dramatic and experiential qualities of the verse? Not in order to "stare the actor down" but because, maybe, by experiencing the verse as an actor would we might gain some understanding of what it means for verse to become part of the action.

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<sup>226</sup> Maxwell, *On Poetry*, 133.

This implies taking a closer look at the way in which actors approach verse for the purposes of performance. Texts on the techniques of speaking and acting dramatic verse, at least those aimed at actors working in English, are almost all focused on the works of Shakespeare. Leading practitioners such as Peter Hall<sup>227</sup>, John Barton<sup>228</sup>, Cicely Berry<sup>229</sup>, Patsy Rodenburg<sup>230</sup>, Giles Block<sup>231</sup>, Patrick Tucker<sup>232</sup>, Barbara Houseman<sup>233</sup> and Kirsten Linklater<sup>234</sup> all offer advice to actors looking to tackle Shakespeare's verse. It has been noted, however, that an interest in dramatic action, as understood by contemporary Stanislavskian practitioners, may not be considered appropriate for the interpretation and performance of plays written in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras and that, indeed, some practitioners reject such techniques when it comes to approaching Shakespeare. At the same time, it has also been noted that many contemporary practitioners do apply Stanislavskian notions to Shakespeare's plays. Stanislavsky himself certainly discusses Shakespearean characters and a number of his followers seem to work on the assumption that the principles of the system can be applied just as readily to Shakespeare's plays as to any other. When it comes to, not just a discussion of Shakespeare's characters as substantive agents with actions to play, but an explanation as to how the specific qualities of the verse as verse are used as part of the action, we find that there is a gap in the system.

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<sup>227</sup> Peter Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2009).

<sup>228</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*.

<sup>229</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor And The Text* (London: Virgin Books, 2000).

<sup>230</sup> Patsy Rodenburg, *Speaking Shakespeare* (London: Methuen Drama, 2005).

<sup>231</sup> Giles Block, *Speaking The Speech: An Actor's Guide To Shakespeare* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013).

<sup>232</sup> Tucker, *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare*.

<sup>233</sup> Barbara Houseman, *Finding Your Voice: A Complete Voice Training Manual for Actors* (New York : London: Nick Hern Books, 2002).

<sup>234</sup> Kristin Linklater, *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010).

The issue is that practitioners engaged in describing Stanislavsky's system, though happy to discuss Shakespeare in general, do not attempt to tackle the specific issues of speaking and interpreting dramatic verse. This may be because, whilst Stanislavskian practitioners are undoubtedly aware of its challenges, verse-speaking is considered a fairly specialist skill, irrelevant to many of the prose texts that actors will encounter, and therefore beyond the scope of books about Stanislavsky. This is what we find when Bella Merlin, for example, discusses Shakespearean characters in the same breath as those created by modern playwrights – “Given circumstances are essentially the springboards for your imagination to propel you towards what Stanislavsky calls the magic ‘if’: ‘What would I do if I suspected my uncle had murdered my father?’ (*Hamlet*) ‘What would I do if my wife was accused of witchcraft and I knew she was innocent?’ (*The Crucible*)”<sup>235</sup> – and notes that, when it comes to Shakespeare, “certain characters speak in prose, others in poetry: the language tends to be very muscular, and – as is the case with most Shakespearean characters – they all enjoy words, taking a distinct pleasure in the sound of their own voices”<sup>236</sup>. However, when it comes to a more detailed discussion of textual features, Merlin directs her readers to “the excellent thoughts and exercises in the books of contemporary voice teachers”<sup>237</sup>. This seems quite sensible. To expect a single book to offer a complete guide to Stanislavsky and provide an in-depth discussion of performing iambic pentameter is perhaps a little unreasonable.

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<sup>235</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 67.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

When we turn to books dedicated to voice, verse and text work for the actor, however, we find the opposite ‘problem’: the assumption that actors should play actions is there, but, for all the guidance on understanding and speaking the verse, the precise nature of the relationship between verse-speaking and action-playing remains mysterious. Thus, in his guide to ‘speaking the speech’, Giles Block advises us that, “it’s worth remembering the *obvious*. We speak in order to bring about a change... Speaking is an action; it is designed to have an effect”<sup>238</sup> (my italics). The ‘obvious’ point is that the verse serves the action. But when it comes to describing the qualities of the verse as verse, we tend to be offered emotions and feelings rather than actions and activities: “verse is the emotional expression of thought”<sup>239</sup>; verse “supports the emotion”<sup>240</sup>, the use of a particular stress “releases a strong emotional charge”<sup>241</sup>, Shakespeare uses verse to “capture the sounds of some emotional states”<sup>242</sup>, we can use the verse to “put us in touch with the emotions behind the thoughts”<sup>243</sup>. Along the way, we do get some hints as how verse might be used actively. In discussing a speech of Queen Margaret’s from *Henry VI, Part 2*, Block tells us, “the trochee is assertive and makes us ‘sit up and listen’; which is just what Queen Margaret wants her audience, both on stage and in the theatre, to do.”<sup>244</sup> As actions go, making people ‘sit up and listen’ may seem rather ‘general’, but it is an active pursuit and moreover it is linked to a specific feature of the verse. Such glimpses, however, are fleeting and more often than not the emotional and ‘poetic’ qualities of verse take centre stage. Hall informs us that when there are variations in the construction of Shakespeare’s

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<sup>238</sup> Block, *Speaking The Speech*, 16.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.



verse, “there are usually emotional reasons for them”<sup>245</sup>, Kristin Linklater tells us that if we engage with Shakespeare’s text, “you will experience the emotion that Shakespeare intended”<sup>246</sup>. Cicely Berry insists that, “in the discipline of poetic text we have to release our feeling through the structure of the speech”<sup>247</sup>. All of these points are valid and I do not mean to deny the emotional content of Shakespeare’s verse, but emotional expression, in and of itself, does not create a distinction between the merits of lyrical verse and those of dramatic verse: expressing feelings for their own sake is not active and action is the “chief element of our art”.

The difficulty, then, is that if rigorous analysis of dramatic verse is left to experts in the ‘voice and text department’ who, in turn, leave the rigorous application of Stanislavskian principles to the teachers of acting, this leaves a gap in our understanding of how verse might make a specific contribution to action. It may well be that, in practice, actors, directors and teachers are bridging this gap but, if so, we lack a clear and consistent explanation of how they are doing it.

The director John Barton is perhaps the most explicit in his aim of “marrying the two traditions” of Shakespearean verse-speaking and Stanislavskian action-playing. He begins *Playing Shakespeare* by acknowledging the difficulty I have been considering above:

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<sup>245</sup> Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players*, 30.

<sup>246</sup> Linklater, *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*, 54.

<sup>247</sup> Berry, *The Actor And The Text*, 47.

...But what's so difficult about acting Shakespeare? What's the problem? Or indeed 'Is there a problem?' Well, yes, I believe that there is. Two things need to come together and they won't without a lot of hard work and much trial and error. First, there's Shakespeare's text written at a particular time and for particular actors... Secondly there are the actors today with their modern habit of mind and their different acting tradition...<sup>248</sup>

Part of this difficulty can be explained by what Barton refers to as the "naturalistic fallacy"<sup>249</sup> of modern actors feeling compelled to downplay the language of the text, to insert pauses and hesitations and so on in order to make the text 'real'. Barton also suggests that, "to go solely for the heightened language is as dangerous as to plump totally for naturalism"<sup>250</sup> and concludes that "a right balance has to be found between the naturalistic and heightened elements in [Shakespeare's] text"<sup>251</sup>. In terms of incorporating Stanislavskian principles into the discussion of Shakespeare, Barton suggests that the thing to remember is:

The importance of asking the question, 'What is my intention?' If we had to reduce our modern tradition to one single point, I think it would be this. It is practical advice which always works and always helps the actor. Yet it is often confusing to people who approach a text from a literary or non-theatrical view-point.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, 8.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

By asking the question ‘What is my intention?’ Barton is emphasising the importance of action<sup>253</sup>. However, the idea that what we are after is a “balance” between Shakespearean verse-speaking and Stanislavskian action-playing does suggest that they are opposing forces rather than active partners; that we need to do two different things at the same time (being mindful that one doesn’t come to overshadow the other) rather than doing one thing that binds both elements together. Valid and useful as Barton’s approach has proved, it does not provide a systematic way of analysing and interpreting verse as serving an active function.

Barton does, however, offer a tantalising glimpse of what an action-based understanding of verse might look like. Discussing Henry V’s famous line:

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more (Henry V, 3.1.1)<sup>254</sup>

Barton concludes that the line contains seven strong stresses<sup>255</sup>:

So what is Shakespeare doing there? Well, we can ask ourselves what Henry V is doing. What’s his intention? To persuade his soldiers to go back into the breach. A tired, out-of-breath leader desperately trying to reach and rally his men. Now this strongly overstressed verse line reinforces this.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> I would, however, raise slight concerns of the choice of the word ‘intention’ over ‘action’ or ‘activity’. Action in Stanislavsky’s sense is intentional, but it is quite possible to have an intention without that intention translating into action.

<sup>254</sup> All Shakespearean quotations and line references are from *Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan, and Richard Proudfoot, (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011).

<sup>255</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, 27.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Barton does not pause for long enough to explain quite how and why the verse line reinforces the activity 'to rally', nor to explore the connection between strong stresses and being 'tired and out-of-breath'. Perhaps he takes these connections to be self-evident. Though both rhythmic variations in the verse and character 'intentions' are discussed throughout *Playing Shakespeare*, they are never again linked together so explicitly. Yet, I believe that in this almost throwaway remark lies the seed of an idea that, if refined, extended and applied systematically, could throw additional light on contemporary approaches to interpreting dramatic verse for performance.

My intention, then, is to build on the work of practitioners such as Barton so that potential links between the construction of the verse and the actions and activities of the dramatic character are made clear and explicit. If I can gain a coherent understanding of how and why verse could be used by actors to 'reinforce' or 'intensify' the dramatic action of a scene then this will not only have the potential to benefit actors themselves; it might also allow me, as a dramatist, to construct verse for the specific purpose of action in performance. In translating this intention into action, however, there is another obstacle to negotiate.

In her recent book *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*<sup>257</sup>, Abigail Rokison offers a thorough and at times stinging critique of contemporary approaches to interpreting

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<sup>257</sup> Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*.

Shakespeare for performance. Her main criticism is that practitioners including Hall, Barton, Berry and Rodenburg:

All work from the principle that the structure of Shakespeare's verse provides actors with 'clues' as to how to speak the lines. The language used by [these practitioners] betrays their intentionalist aims, referring to the need to convey 'Shakespeare's meaning'. It is also interesting in its inference about the relationship between author and actor. Rather than viewing the verse structure as a stylistic device that enhances the meaning of the words, and which is a feature of poetic form from its earliest incarnations, the authors speak of versification and lineation as deliberate 'authorial' means of guiding the actors in the delivery of the lines.<sup>258</sup>

This, in the first instance, is not a question of how the verse might be used actively, but of how the verse ought to be spoken. The clearest example of basing interpretations of Shakespeare's verse on a supposed knowledge of the author's intentions is provided by Peter Hall: "Shakespeare tells the actor when to go fast and when to go slow; when to come in on cue, and when to accent a particular word or series of words. He tells the actor to do much else; and he always tells him when to do it (provided the actor knows where to look)."<sup>259</sup> The idea of Shakespeare 'telling the actor what to do' is also seen in Barton's suggestion that the verse might be understood as containing a series of "hidden stage-directions"<sup>260</sup>. Rokison criticises the 'prescriptive' nature of such an approach,

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>259</sup> Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, 13.

<sup>260</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, 30.

noting that, “practitioners have a tendency to imply that there are ‘rules’... and to neglect the possibility of variation and development in Shakespeare’s use of metrical structures.”<sup>261</sup> Such approaches are therefore ‘reductive’ and restrict the interpretative freedom of actors. Rokison’s considerations echo the concerns of Peter Holland when he discusses the “dominance of the Shakespeare text over the actor”, leading to the sense that “the actor’s task is to get it right, not to make choices, to do what Shakespeare requires, not what the social and historical conditions of performance demand”<sup>262</sup>. Michael Corder finds that editors of Shakespeare can be just as ‘reductive’ by making pronouncements about how lines and passages should be interpreted in a way that, “misrepresents the complexity of choices”<sup>263</sup> available to readers and performers.

My own concerns about such ‘prescriptive’ approaches to the performance of dramatic verse are as follows: Firstly, from an acting perspective, such approaches seem to contradict some of the basic principles of the way in which Stanislavskian practitioners understand and interpret dramatic texts. Within Stanislavsky’s system the text is understood as presenting questions for the actor, not a series of instructions. To be told that there is one pre-determined, ‘correct’ way of speaking any given line and that any alternative readings are therefore ‘wrong’, kills the possibility of creative exploration. From a playwright’s perspective, however, one might think that being able to tell the actors what to do would be a great boon. Eliot would approve, although he might doubt the ability of

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<sup>261</sup> Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*, 13.

<sup>262</sup> Peter Holland, ‘Shakespeare’s Two Bodies’ in Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen, eds., *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 41.

<sup>263</sup> Michael Corder, ‘Editing Macbeth’ in Peter Holland, ed., *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 96.

the actors to ever get it 'right'. My concern here is not that a verse dramatist might have a particular performance choice in mind and try to construct lines in a way that reflects that choice – that seems to me to be quite a sensible way of approaching the task – but that, if all the verse amounts to is a series of 'encoded instructions' for the actor, then this is in danger of reducing verse construction to an arbitrary sign-system. If my sole aim is to tell the actor what to do by hiding 'stage-directions' in the verse, my task might be a relatively easy one. I just need to decide which feature of the verse 'means' what and then teach this 'code' to actors: an initial 'trochee' means that the actor should play the activity 'to charm', a 'feminine ending' means that the actor should play the activity 'to intimidate', and so on. This would provide a clear and consistent way of linking verse construction to active performance choices. But what would be the point? These 'meanings' are arbitrary. I might just as well write my instructions as stage-directions next to the text rather than go to all the trouble of 'hiding' them in the verse. If there is an active performance choice attached to a particular line of verse then it is my contention that the choice should be made on the basis of how a particular verse construction can be used within a particular dramatic context, not on the basis of appeals to authority.

There is, however, another consideration. For the actor, being told (or learning to decipher) authorial intention does provide a clear reason as to why a line should be performed in a particular way. When the author has a reputation such as Shakespeare's, this 'authority' carries a lot of weight. If Shakespeare himself is telling you to perform the line in a particular way, then it is a brave actor who ignores the instruction. What happens, though, if this authority is removed? If we go to the other extreme and say that there are no rules whatsoever restricting the

way in which actors 'ought' to speak the verse – if it is simply a case of saying it however you feel like – then this is not useful for the playwright either. If there is no reason to suppose that actors 'ought' to treat the verse in any particular way then, once again, the effort a verse dramatist might expend in constructing the verse to serve a particular purpose seems to be waste of time and energy. This is what I refer to as the 'is-ought' problem of dramatic verse: how can we move from a discussion of how the verse is constructed to a discussion of how the verse ought to be performed without imposing a series of restrictive, arbitrary 'rules'? This question will be addressed in the next chapter.



## Chapter 2: The Verse Psychology Game

### 2.1 Playing with Words

I have suggested that in order to develop an action-based approach to writing dramatic verse, it is necessary to understand how actors might interpret and use such verse actively. However, when it comes to the issue of action-playing, I have also identified a lack of clarity and consistency in contemporary attitudes towards interpreting dramatic verse for performance. My aim is to build on Barton's work of 'marrying the two traditions' and offer a framework in which the relationship between verse-speaking and action-playing can be understood more clearly. Such a framework should avoid both the 'vague and woolly' approaches to verse and action described by Gaskill, and the reductive and prescriptive reliance on 'appeals to authority' criticised by Rokison.

The framework I propose is what I call the Verse Psychology Game. In this chapter, I describe three key concepts within that framework:

The first is that interpreting dramatic texts according to Stanislavskian principles of dramatic truth and dramatic action can be regarded as a kind of game, governed by 'constitutive rules'. Such rules allow actors to make informed judgements about the 'success' or 'appropriateness' of their performance choices, whilst still allowing considerable scope for interpretive freedom and creativity. This casts the playwright in the role of "gamewright". The 'playwright-as-gamewright' can use this understanding of the acting process to make informed judgements about the

performative potential of a dramatic text; that is, the extent to which a text allows or affords active performance choices.

The second key concept is that of dramatic hyperactivity: a 'heightened' or 'intensified' form of action-playing. Such hyperactivity will not resemble the behaviour of people in everyday life. However, within an appropriate dramatic context, such behaviour might still be considered 'logical and coherent' and therefore truthful. Moreover, certain texts might require 'heightened' performance choices. In other words, hyperactivity might be considered more truthful in certain dramatic contexts than 'naturalistic' performance choices. Plays requiring hyperactive performance are considered to be specialist versions of the Stanislavskian acting game and I argue that actors engaged in such versions of the game require specialist 'tools'. My contention is that metrical dramatic verse can operate as a specialist 'tool' replete with hyperactive potential.

The third component of the Verse Psychology Game is what I refer to as the Motion in Poetry Metaphor. The key concept here is that the rhythms of metrical dramatic verse can be understood and experienced in terms of purposeful movements of the human body, and that these movements can, in turn, be understood and experienced as embodying the psychophysical sensations of specific dramatic activities. The Motion in Poetry Metaphor is an example of Conceptual Metaphor as discussed by Lakoff and Johnson, who demonstrate that the use of metaphor is not just a poetic device, but an essential part of how we as human beings "understand and experience"<sup>264</sup> ourselves, our ideas, and the world

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<sup>264</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

around us. Familiar examples of such metaphorical concepts include, “argument is war”<sup>265</sup>, “time is money”<sup>266</sup>, “more is up”<sup>267</sup> and “life is a journey”<sup>268</sup>. Such metaphors give voice to experiential truths<sup>269</sup>. That is, when we use the conceptual metaphor, we don’t just say that ‘argument’ is war, we experience it as such.

My contention is that the metaphorical concept ‘verse rhythm is physical movement’ has often been used to understand and experience verse rhythm<sup>270</sup>, but that the full dramatic potential of this concept has not been utilised. The metaphorical nature of the concept has rarely been explored, and it has been applied to the discussion of verse rhythm on an *ad hoc* basis rather than being employed systematically. Furthermore, this concept has not been linked to another metaphor concerning the relationship between physical movement and dramatic action-playing. Vladimir Mirodan identifies a metaphorical concept at the heart of the *Laban-Malmgren System* of actor training: “psychological action is physical action”<sup>271</sup>. Utilising this metaphor, actors learn to understand and experience dramatic activities as purposeful movements of the human body which can be described and categorised according to Laban’s system of Working Actions. For example, playing an activity such as ‘to charm’ might be understood and experienced as a Gliding (Light/Direct/Sustained) movement, whereas playing an

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>270</sup> E.g. Robert Beum and Karl Shapiro, *The Prosody Handbook: A Guide to Poetic Form* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2009), 1; Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 21; Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 266; Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 73; Peter L. Groves, *Strange Music: The Metre of the English Heroic Line* (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria Department of English, 1998), 39; Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3; Berry, *The Actor And The Text*, 108; Michael D. Hurley and Michael O’Neill, *Poetic Form: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18.

<sup>271</sup> Mirodan, ‘Acting the Metaphor’, 40.

activity such as ‘to intimidate’ might be understood and experienced as a Punching (Strong/Direct/Quick) movement. Thus an actor’s engagement in action-playing is regarded not merely as a ‘psychological’ process but as an embodied, psychophysical process, rooted in experiential truth.

If the rhythm of a particular line of metrical dramatic verse can be understood and experienced in terms of a particular physical movement, and if that physical movement can be understood and experienced in terms of a particular dramatic activity, then metrical dramatic verse has the potential to embody dramatic action. This is the Motion in Poetry Metaphor. If the rhythms of metrical verse can generate experiences of physical movement in a manner that is beyond the capacity of ‘naturalistic prose’, then this allows for the possibility of the dramatic function of metrical verse being, not only active, but hyperactive.

To approach the task of interpreting dramatic verse for performance using all three of these concepts is to play a game of Verse Psychology. To compose dramatic verse in accordance with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game is to assume the role of ‘playwright-as-gamewright’. Throughout this discussion, I limit my examination of an actor’s approach to dramatic verse to what Bella Merlin calls “mental reconnaissance”<sup>272</sup>; that is, to the work of the actor in making preliminary performance choices in response to a particular dramatic text. In light of the above discussion, I prefer the term ‘experiential reconnaissance’, but, whichever term is used, I do not explore later stages of the acting process in which actors, directors and other practitioners collaborate to refine, challenge and alter performance

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<sup>272</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 60.

choices in the shared space of the rehearsal room, nor do I discuss the interactions of actors and audience members as part of a live performance on stage. There are two main reasons for this: the first is the need to place sensible limits on the scope of this inquiry. Questions of rehearsal and live performance are, no doubt, important and worthy of further investigation, but it would not be possible to give them proper consideration as part of this thesis. The second is that my primary purpose in discussing the acting process is to explore it as a playwright who is adopting an actor's perspective in order to better understand the dramatic potential of metrical verse. My assumption is that 'experiential reconnaissance' is the portion of the acting process with which the 'playwright-as-gamewright' can engage most readily.

## 2.2 Drama Games

### Minding the Gap

Abigail Rokison criticises 'prescriptive' approaches to the interpretation of dramatic verse, which claim or attempt to match 'correct' performance choices to 'knowable' authorial intentions<sup>273</sup>. I have suggested that such approaches run the risk of rendering the connection between verse construction and performance choices arbitrary; reducing the role of the verse dramatist to one of 'encoding instructions' rather than of creating verse with experiential qualities that lend themselves to a particular dramatic purpose. Within twentieth century literary theory, assuming that authorial intention should guide the interpretation of texts has been decried as the

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<sup>273</sup> Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*, 8–37.

“intentional fallacy”<sup>274</sup>. Roland Barthes, in announcing the “Death of the Author”<sup>275</sup>, also heralds the “birth of the reader”<sup>276</sup>, and the reader’s role in determining the meaning of a text has gained considerable attention in recent decades. Reader-response theorists such as David Bleich question the significance, not only of the intentions of the author who created a text, but even of the text itself: “The object of attention is not the item itself but is the response of those who observe it.”<sup>277</sup> Notions such as Umberto Eco’s “open work”<sup>278</sup>, Julia Kristeva’s “intertextuality”<sup>279</sup>, and Derrida’s “freeplay”<sup>280</sup> of signifiers, further disrupt the idea of a straightforward route from a knowable authorial intention to a ‘correct’ interpretation. The concern for some “traditional, text-oriented critics”<sup>281</sup> is that we might end up with a form of “anarchic subjectivism, allowing readers to interpret a text any way they want.”<sup>282</sup> Eco himself has warned of the dangers of “overinterpretation”<sup>283</sup> in contemporary approaches to literature, which “licence the reader to produce a limitless, uncheckable flow of ‘readings’”<sup>284</sup> so that “the glory of the reader is to discover that texts can say everything, except what their author wanted them to mean”<sup>285</sup>.

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<sup>274</sup> William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’, *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468–88.

<sup>275</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 142.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>277</sup> David Bleich, *Epistemological Assumption in the Study of Response* in Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 135.

<sup>278</sup> Umberto Eco, *Opera Aperta* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>279</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 69.

<sup>280</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278.

<sup>281</sup> Ambreen Safder Kharbe, *English Language and Literary Criticism* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing, 2009), 398.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> Umberto Eco and Stefan Collini, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

The worry – or the hope – that readers or actors could be completely ‘free’ in their interpretations of a text, with no constraints placed on them whatsoever, is out of step with contemporary theories of embodied cognition. The notion of such freewheeling ‘subjectivity’ is, according to Lakoff and Johnson, “a misunderstanding based on the cultural assumption that the only alternative to objectivism is radical subjectivity – that is either you believe in absolute truth or you can make the world in your own image”<sup>286</sup>. Cognitive science tells us that “the mind is inherently embodied”<sup>287</sup> and that, as a result, “there is no poststructuralist person – no completely decentred subject for whom all meaning is arbitrary, totally relative, and purely historically contingent, unconstrained by body and brain.”<sup>288</sup>

Our ‘subjective’ responses are dependent upon and constrained by embodied experience and our embodied interactions with the world. When it comes to the interpretation of dramatic texts, approaches that look at reader-response within the context of embodied experience may, therefore, prove enlightening. Appropriate models might be found in the “Literary Darwinism”<sup>289</sup> (or “evocriticism”<sup>290</sup>) of critics such as Joseph Carroll and Brian Boyd, which insists that “deep human subjectivity depends fundamentally on the physical, biological reality of human life – on physical sensations that put people in touch with a real physical world”<sup>291</sup> and seeks to locate the creation of literature and its interpretation within the “biologically grounded dispositions of human nature”<sup>292</sup>; or in the cognitive poetics of Reuven Tsur, which, in examining the cognitive underpinnings of reader-

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<sup>286</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 185.

<sup>287</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 3.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>289</sup> Joseph Carroll, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice* (New York: SUNY Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>290</sup> Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 386.

<sup>291</sup> Carroll, *Reading Human Nature*, 93.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

response, navigates “between the Scylla of Impressionism and the Charybdis of Reductionism, trying to escape the perils of both”<sup>293</sup>.

Tsur’s theories of cognitive poetics are explored at length in the next chapter. However, knowing that all responses to a text are governed by the constraints of embodied cognition does not, in itself, help us to make value judgements concerning those responses – to say that one embodied response or interpretation is somehow ‘better’, ‘more successful’ or ‘more appropriate’ than another. This, I suggest, is a theatrical equivalent to the ‘is-ought’ gap identified by David Hume. ‘Hume’s Law’ states that, “no ought-judgement may be correctly inferred from a set of premises expressed only in terms of ‘is’.”<sup>294</sup> From the perspective of moral philosophy, this means that it is a fallacy to derive moral imperatives from naturalistic observations. Transposed to the interpretation of dramatic texts, the argument is that no judgement as to how a text ought to be interpreted or performed may be correctly inferred from observations about the way in which that text is constructed.

The solution I propose involves treating Stanislavskian acting and, by extension, an action-based approach to performing dramatic verse, as a game. The idea that game-structures might bridge the is-ought gap derives from an argument first put forward by the philosopher John Searle<sup>295</sup>. According to Searle, the process of

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<sup>293</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 429.

<sup>294</sup> Rachel Cohon, ‘Hume’s Moral Philosophy’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2010, 2010, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/hume-moral/>.

<sup>295</sup> John R. Searle, ‘How to Derive “Ought” From “Is”’, *The Philosophical Review* 73, no. 1 (1964): 43–58.



moving from an 'is' to an 'ought' can, under certain circumstances, be relatively straightforward. To illustrate, he imagines himself a baseball player:

We are in our half of the seventh inning and I have a big lead off second base. The pitcher whirls, fires to the shortstop covering, and I am tagged out a good ten feet down the line. The umpire shouts, "Out!" I, however, being a positivist, hold my ground. The umpire tells me to return to the dugout. I point out to him that you can't derive an "ought" from an "is." No set of descriptive statements describing matters of fact, I say, will entail any evaluative statements to the effect that I should or ought to leave the field. "You just can't get orders or recommendations from facts alone." What is needed is an evaluative major premise. I therefore return to and stay on second base (until I am carried off the field). I think everyone feels my claims here to be preposterous, and preposterous in the sense of logically absurd.<sup>296</sup>

Baseball is governed by constitutive rules. Such rules create the game of baseball and if you take them away then the game ceases to exist. If I am under no obligation to follow the rules of baseball then, whatever else I might be doing, I am not playing baseball. On this basis, we can move from an is-statement ('John is playing baseball') to an ought-judgement ('John ought to follow the rules of baseball') without any difficulty<sup>297</sup>, and to say that the baseball player in Searle's scenario is 'out' is not a matter of personal opinion but an 'institutional fact'.

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>297</sup> To say 'John is playing baseball therefore John ought to play by the rules of baseball' is not only true but tautological.

If a Stanislavskian acting process can be shown to conform to the structure of a game then we can ground our understanding of what we call 'good' or 'successful' acting (and, by extension, what we mean when we make statements about what an actor 'ought' to do) in an examination of the constitutive rules of that game. We will then be in a position to determine if and how those rules might apply to the performance of dramatic verse. The idea of interpretation as a game is not without precedent. Francois Lyotard, for example, discusses reader response and interpretation in terms of Wittgensteinian 'language games'<sup>298</sup>. However, the understanding of game-play that I wish to employ here stems not from Wittgenstein but from another philosopher, Bernard Suits:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by the rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. I also offer the following simpler and, so to speak, more portable version of the above: playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.<sup>299</sup>

One of the games that Suits examines in order to arrive at this definition is golf. The prelusory goal of golf is to get a ball into a hole in the ground. In setting out to achieve this goal, golfers accept that they must limit themselves to the lusory means of the game: they must get the ball into the hole by hitting it around the

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<sup>298</sup> Jean François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Manchester University Press, 1985), 59.

<sup>299</sup> *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (London: Broadview Press, 2014), 43.

course with a golf club. The lusory means are created and restricted by constitutive rules: The game can only be played using the permitted clubs (which we might call the 'lusory tools'), the ball must be transported to the hole using the permitted action or 'lusory procedure' of hitting the ball (as opposed to, say, taping the ball to the club and carrying it to the hole), golfers must carry out the lusory procedure for themselves (no asking someone else to take the shot or using some sort of golf-swinging machine) and are therefore restricted by what we might call the individual player's 'lusory capacity' and 'lusory competence', the first shot must be taken from a specified point and every shot must fall within the boundaries of the specified course (the 'lusory arena'), and so on. In relation to the prelusory goal, the constitutive rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means. If golfers wished to achieve the prelusory goal for its own sake then they could do so quite efficiently by picking up a ball and placing it into a hole. In so doing they would not, however, have played or won a game of golf. In order to play golf they need to adopt a lusory attitude, that is, they must choose to accept the rules that constitute the game<sup>300</sup>. If Stanislavskian acting is a game, then it too must be governed by constitutive rules. Actors abide by those rules in order to play the game.

Constitutive rules can be distinguished from "rules of skill"<sup>301</sup>. In golf, rules of skill include 'keep your eye on the ball' and 'use a sand wedge to get yourself out of a bunker'. These are not really rules at all; they are useful hints and tips. Rules of

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<sup>300</sup> Whilst the lusory means of golf are inefficient in relation to the prelusory goal, they are nonetheless very effective within the context of the game. The same can be said of kicking the ball in football and of the permitted moves in a game of chess. Inefficient but effective means might therefore be taken as a sign of a 'well-made game'. A game with inefficient and ineffective means – a version of golf, for instance, in which players were restricted to hitting the ball with a feather – would, I suggest, be unlikely to catch on.

<sup>301</sup> *The Grasshopper*, 39.

skill do not create the game: following or ignoring a rule of skill such as ‘keep your eye on the ball’ does not determine whether or not you are playing golf. If you happen to beat your opponents by hitting a hole-in-one with your eyes closed, you have still won fair and square. In acting terms, ‘rules of skill’ find their equivalent in the techniques and recommendations of practitioners. Such techniques might aid the pursuit of ‘good’ acting. However, ‘good’ acting might be achieved without the actor making conscious use of any ‘system’ whatsoever.

### The Purposes of Playing

In applying Suits’ notion of game-playing to acting we face a difficulty: Suits himself states that acting from a script is not, in fact, a game. He is discussing scripted performance within the context of make-believe games such as ‘cops and robbers’. The point of these games is that the players are, within certain limitations, ‘making it up as they go along’. To script such an activity kills the game; it is “like playing a game of solitaire with a stacked deck”<sup>302</sup>. However, to assume that what stage actors are doing is equivalent to playing a scripted game of ‘cops and robbers’ may be misguided. When Suits says that, “acting out a part in a play is simply being enslaved to some script writer. It is like miming the moves in a game which has already been played by someone else,”<sup>303</sup> he assumes that making up the script is equivalent to hitting the ball around a golf course. But making up the script is not the activity in which such actors are engaged. The actor’s role is not to determine which words are to be performed but, rather, how

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 119.

those words are to be performed. The words provided by the playwright are less like the shots played by a golfer and more like the golf clubs with which those shots are played. The shot, then, is the utterance of the words. If the way in which the words are to be performed is prescribed to the actor (via the commandments of an all-powerful author, director or acting teacher) then Suits' point stands. If, on the other hand, actors – like golfers choosing which shots to play – are presented with a wide range of options constrained by constitutive rules, then acting can be described as a game.

I am focusing on what might be described as the 'single-player phase' of the Stanislavskian acting game: the process by which an individual actor prepares and makes performance choices for a particular script. Later, 'multiplayer phases' occur in the rehearsal room and on stage. In its simplest form, the prelusory goal of a single-player acting game might be 'to say words out loud'. The first constitutive rule is that the words in question must be the exact words of a specified role within a specified text. The actor is not allowed to make the text up<sup>304</sup>. Paraphrases and adlibs are considered 'fouls'. If we add the rule that these exact words must be spoken from memory then we have the basis for a 'Cowardian acting game' in which the main injunction is "know your lines and don't bump into the furniture"<sup>305</sup> (not bumping into the furniture being a matter for a later phase in the game).

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<sup>304</sup> This does not discount the possibility of improvisation being used as part of the actor's process for reaching a decision as to how to perform the text. It merely states that an improvised approximation of the text or of imagined scenes surrounding the text can never qualify as the successful completion of the game.

<sup>305</sup> Noel Coward, cited in Jonathan Law, *The Methuen Drama Dictionary of the Theatre* (London: Methuen Drama, 2013), 8.

A Stanislavskian version of the game adds further constitutive rules. These I call the rule of plausibility and the rule of playability. The rule of plausibility means that every line of text must be performed in a way that conforms to the Stanislavskian principles of dramatic truth: it must be 'logical and coherent' for the dramatic character in question to say those words in that way within the dramatic context. The rule of playability means that every utterance must be interpreted and performed as a specific dramatic activity carried out as part of a larger dramatic action. For any given line of a given text there may be numerous performance choices that adhere to the rules of plausibility and playability. The game does not prescribe a single 'correct' choice for any given line. However, by adopting a lusory attitude – by accepting these constitutive rules in order to play the game – the actor gains a framework within which to make informed decisions about their performance choices. As part of this single-player game, the actor must be his or her own 'umpire'; exercising his or her own judgement as to whether a particular choice can be considered 'successful' or 'appropriate' within the context of the game.

In order to make performance choices and to assess the merits of those choices, the actor might adopt 'rules of skill' in the form of Stanislavskian techniques for interpreting a dramatic text. When it comes to the rule of plausibility, choices might be made and assessed using a process of 'question and answer'. Actors learn to ask and answer "fundamental questions"<sup>306</sup> about a scene, such as 'Who am I?', 'Where am I?', and 'What do I want?' These questions can be answered with reference to supporting evidence gleaned from the script. A performance choice

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<sup>306</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 101.

might be considered plausible if it accords with the answers to such questions. When it comes to the rule of playability, an actor might employ the technique of 'actioning' the script<sup>307</sup>, assigning a specific activity to every utterance in the form of a transitive verb. If a performance choice takes the form of a specific dramatic activity and if playing that activity can be justified as 'logical and coherent' behaviour for the character within the dramatic context, then the choice can be considered plausible and playable. As with any game, adhering to rules of skill is optional: an actor who makes plausible, playable choices intuitively is just as successful at playing the game as an actor who makes such choices on the basis of in-depth textual analysis.

If Stanislavskian actors are playing a game when they interpret a script for performance, then this casts the playwright in the role of gamewright. This doesn't mean that with every new script a dramatist must invent the acting game from scratch. The institution of Stanislavskian acting does not depend on the existence of a particular dramatic text any more than the institution of golf depends on the existence of St. Andrew's or The Belfry. The game of golf, however, does require courses and somebody needs to design and construct them. This is the job of the gamewright. In order to do a good job, the designer of a golf course must serve the needs of the golfer.

The golf course – the lusory arena – defines the journey on which players go in order to complete the game and presents a range of features that affect the types of shot a player might attempt. It provides a context without which the game would

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<sup>307</sup> See, for example, Nick Moseley, *Actioning - and How to Do It* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016).

be unplayable and the notion of a good or bad shot would be meaningless. For the playwright-as-gamewright, the equivalent to designing the golf course is constructing the Industrial Action of the play: a particular sequence of events, involving particular characters within a particular world and a particular set of given circumstances. The Industrial Action contextualises the actions and activities chosen and played by the actor just as the golf course contextualises the shots chosen and played by the golfer. It is only within the context of the Industrial Action that a particular performance choice can be considered plausible. Unlike golfers, actors do not bring the equivalent of their own set of clubs to the course nor do they get to choose which club to use for any given 'shot'. I have suggested that the lusory tools of the acting game are the lines of dialogue given in the script. A single club might be used to play a variety of shots, and yet that club will be more suited to certain kinds of shots than others. The same goes for a line of dialogue. An actor's performance choice must not only be playable in principle but playable using the specific line or lines of dialogue given in the text. The responsibility of the playwright-as-gamewright is to ensure that the lusory tools and the lusory arena are well-matched: that the Industrial Action can be enacted plausibly through a series of activities that are playable using the dialogue provided.

In opting to write a line of dialogue in metrical verse, the playwright is handing the actor a particular kind of lusory tool. To understand the function of such tools and justify their inclusion in the game, we need to find answers to three interrelated questions: What kinds of shots are such tools useful for? What are the features of these tools that enable such shots to be played? What are the features of the course that require such shots to be played?



## 2.3 Hyperactivity

### Blaming the Tools

The idea that dramatic verse is a tool with which dramatic actions and activities might be played supports Eliot's injunction that such verse should be treated as a means to an end<sup>308</sup>. However, the game-playing paradigm highlights a contradiction in Eliot's argument. Eliot urges verse dramatists to "enter into overt competition with prose drama"<sup>309</sup>. He also insists that "no play should be written in verse for which prose is *dramatically* adequate"<sup>310</sup> (original emphasis). By advocating overt competition with prose drama, Eliot seems to recommend playing prose drama at its own game. But the texts that Eliot wants to compete with seem perfectly playable without the need for verse. Unless one argues that every prose play of the twentieth century would be improved by rewriting it in verse, then to write a verse play that resembles naturalistic prose drama in every respect apart from being written in verse, must contradict Eliot's instruction to use verse only when prose is dramatically inadequate.

If dramatic dialogue is a lusory tool, then its dramatic 'adequacy' must be judged on the basis of how effectively it can be used to perform a particular dramatic function. If metrical dramatic verse is a specialist lusory tool then it will be used to perform a specialist dramatic function. This assumes, not that verse is inherently

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<sup>308</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 68.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

'better' than prose – or vice versa – but that it might be 'better suited' to a particular kind of task. Eliot suggests that dramatic verse is at its most effective, "when the dramatic situation has reached such a point of intensity that poetry becomes the natural utterance because it is the only language in which the emotions can be expressed at all"<sup>311</sup>. The notion of a heightened dramatic situation in which verse 'comes into its own' is in accordance with the argument that dramatic verse is a specialist lusory tool: the nature of the lusory arena creates the need for a special kind of 'shot' that cannot be completed as effectively with the standard tools. If the Industrial Action of a play presents enough of these specialist circumstances, then the use of verse can be justified from a game-playing perspective, even if the verse isn't being used to its full capacity at every moment in the drama.

There is, however, a major difficulty with adopting Eliot's argument to justify the use of verse within our Stanislavskian acting game. Even if the dramatic situation is intensified to the extent that heightened expressions of emotion become plausible, expressing emotion is not, in itself, a playable performance choice. Eliot's conclusion that the dramatic moments for which prose is inadequate involve a "temporary detachment from action"<sup>312</sup> adds to the difficulty: If action is suspended then the specialist circumstances in which verse is most effective are moments at which playable choices cannot be made in principle. To use the verse effectively one has to suspend the game of action-playing. From a player's

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 85.

perspective, this renders every performance choice that uses the verse to its full potential a 'foul' by definition.

What if the specialist function of dramatic verse is not about 'emotional expression' and does not require the suspension of action? What if, rather than being less active than naturalistic prose, metrical verse has the potential to be more active? What if metrical dramatic verse can be hyperactive?

### Unitary Objectives

In *Games People Play*<sup>313</sup>, Eric Berne offers an analysis of a typical greeting ritual; an informal exchange of 'hellos' between Mr. A and Mr. B.<sup>314</sup> To each conversational turn Berne assigns a certain unitary value based on the level of interest or intensity that the contribution displays. A simple 'hi' is worth one unit, whereas 'haven't seen you around lately' is credited with two. The unitary values are assigned to each turn intuitively by participants, who have an implicit understanding of roughly how many units are required to complete the ritual. This is dependent on a number of factors: the immediate circumstances, the history and nature of the relationship between Mr. A and Mr. B, how long it has been since they last saw one another, etc. In Berne's example, the two men pass each other on a daily basis and their greeting ritual tends to involve an eight-unit exchange. This amounts to, on average, a quick hello, a couple of 'how are you?' questions (which aren't expected to be answered in any great detail) and then

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<sup>313</sup> Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–37.

‘good bye’, ‘see you later’. If the eight-unit ritual is not performed then at least one of the participants will feel snubbed. In Berne’s phrase, “his spinal cord will shrivel slightly”<sup>315</sup>. If, on the other hand, Mr. B’s response to the usual ‘how are you?’ is to answer the question in depth, embarking on a long and lurid account of an ongoing love affair and subsequently seeking the gory details of Mr. A’s personal life, then Mr. A will wonder what on earth is going on: Mr. B is serving up more units than are understood to be appropriate. The thing to consider is what happens in an exchange requiring a large number of units but in which the participants don’t have time to exchange one unit at a time. Berne tells us that “these can be compressed into a few transactions, if those transactions are emphatic enough.”<sup>316</sup> In other words, the participants can endeavour to pack more units of ‘intensity’ into each conversational turn<sup>317</sup>. Transposed to the discussion of Interpersonal Action in drama, ‘intensified’ activities – compressing multiple ‘units’ of action into each utterance – is precisely what I mean by the term hyperactivity.

A relatively easy and straightforward dramatic action might only require a very small number of units. If Character A’s action is to get Character B to make her a cup of tea and if Character B is in a good mood, on the way to the kitchen and eager to stay in Character A’s good books, then Character A might not need to work very hard. One or two units of ‘to charm’ might do the trick. If Character B has only just sat down after a hard day and is very aware of the fact that Character A hasn’t made him a cup of tea this side of the last General Election, then a few

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Berne’s interest in the interplay of conversational turns find parallels in studies of Conversational Analysis and Pragmatics. e.g. Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, ‘A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation’, *Language* 50, no. 4 (1974): 696–735; Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 296–303.

more units may be required. The higher the stakes, the bigger the action and the more difficult that action is to achieve, the greater the number of units it will require in order for the action to be completed in a way that is 'logical and coherent'.

If the appropriate number of units cannot be delivered then the action will fail. This happens in life and it happens in drama: we don't always get what we want. If, however, at the end of a scene an action is completed successfully then an appropriate number of units ought to have been delivered. The actor and the playwright share responsibility for this. The actor must ensure that the activities of the scene are played with an appropriate degree of 'intensity' to make the end result logical and coherent. The playwright must ensure that the actor has been given lusory tools that enable those activities to be played in an appropriate way. If the number of units delivered and the outcome of the scene do not match up then either the action-playing or the response (or possibly both together) will fail to display 'dramatic truth'.

Imagine that I am playing a scene with a fairly straightforward action for my character. My action is to make Bob give me a hundred pounds. At the end of the scene Bob gives me the money. Given the relationship that my character has with Bob and the circumstances of the scene – Bob doesn't like my character very much and has earmarked the money for a night on the town – the completion of the action requires a fairly large number of units. Let's call it two hundred units. If, when Bob hands over the cash, my character has only delivered fifty units of action-playing, it is not plausible for him to agree to give me the money. In life, we imagine, Bob would refuse but, because the script demands it, he gives in. The

drama has become 'untruthful'. Now let's imagine the opposite problem: I am playing a very low-stakes scene in which my action is to make Jessica agree to change the television channel. Jessica offers minimal resistance; she isn't terribly bothered about the programme that she's watching and she isn't averse to the idea of watching *University Challenge* instead. Completing the action might require the expenditure of ten units. If by the time the channel changes I have served up several hundred units then the drama will seem absurd. My action-playing is far too intense for the situation and so my behaviour seems illogical and incoherent. Jessica's behaviour seems bizarre as well. A more logical and coherent response to my action-playing might be to burst out laughing, send for a doctor or run out of the room screaming. Once again, the drama has become 'untruthful'.

A plausible, 'truthful' performance choice will deliver a level of 'intensity' that is appropriate to the dramatic situation and give logic and coherence to the sequence of action of which it is a part.

The first instance of dramatic 'failure' described above might be taken as an example of 'underactivity', the second as an example of 'over-activity'. What, then, of hyperactivity? Some plays require large-scale, difficult, high-stakes actions to be performed in a relatively short space of time. Imagine that I am playing a scene in which my action is to seduce a proud, intelligent young woman. The problem is that the young woman in question hates me. I've recently killed her husband and, at the moment I have chosen for the seduction, she is mourning over the corpse of her father-in-law. I happened to kill him too. To woo such a woman in such a humour – and, more than that, to 'win' her – will require a hefty exchange of units.

One might dedicate a whole play to such an action and still struggle to find ‘truth’ in its successful completion. As it is, in the space of a few short pages of dialogue the lady will accept a love token from me, paving the way for our marriage. If the scene is played at a naturalistic tempo then, however close its resemblance to the energies of real-life conversation, the scene will not achieve ‘truth’ as we have come to understand it. In order to give logic and coherence to the scene, I will need to pack a large number of units into each and every line. The behaviour that enables such high-intensity action-playing might seem extraordinary, and yet, within the imagined world of the play, it is precisely this kind of ‘unnatural’ behaviour that will make the performance ‘truthful’. An acting style that can deliver such intensity and a writing style that can facilitate it are the building blocks of dramatic hyperactivity.

If metrical dramatic verse has hyperactive potential and if enabling hyperactive performance can be viewed as the primary dramatic function of such verse then we might reformulate Eliot’s assertion that “no play should be written in verse for which prose is dramatically adequate”<sup>318</sup> as, “no play should be written in verse unless the ‘truthful’ realisation of the action requires hyperactivity”. When it comes to providing dramatic and lusory justification for the use of metrical verse then, according to this conception, the profundity of the ideas explored and discussed in the play is irrelevant, the spiritual and philosophical import of the drama is irrelevant, the ‘meaning’ of the piece is irrelevant, the depth of feeling experienced and expressed by the characters is irrelevant, the nature of what I have called the Ideological Action of the play is, to all intents and purposes, irrelevant. What

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<sup>318</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 68.

matters is what we might call the 'magnitude' of the Interpersonal Action. The justification for the use of metrical verse in drama is essentially pragmatic: a play telling an 'action-packed' (though ultimately vacuous) adventure story might justify the use of verse more readily than a 'deep and meaningful' work unfolding at a naturalistic tempo. This is not to say that a play written in metrical verse could or should not explore weighty themes and complex emotions; it is merely to argue that such themes and such emotions do not, in and of themselves, provide dramatic justification for the use of metrical verse<sup>319</sup>.

The idea that the use of verse is justified by the magnitude of the action echoes a comment made by Giles Block: "Rather than calling verse 'a heightened language', I prefer to say that it is 'a language appropriate for a heightened situation'"<sup>320</sup>. The language (or at least the form in which the language is written) is heightened, but only to the degree demanded by the scene. This also gives a different perspective on the use of myth and other forms of heightened storytelling. Eliot suggests that verse dramatists are attracted to history and mythology because such settings are "far enough away from the present for the characters not to need to be recognizable as human beings, and therefore for them to be licensed to talk in verse"<sup>321</sup>. I have maintained that, on the contrary, Stanislavskian principles of dramatic truth are just as applicable to plays about mythical kings and queens as they are to 'realistic' plays about arms manufacturers, epic tales of talking rabbits or sci-fi adventures set on Mars: "it doesn't matter what genre,

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<sup>319</sup> One might argue that such themes justify the use of verse indirectly: the depth and complexity of the Ideological Action justifies the use of a large scale Industrial Action, which in turn requires the Interpersonal Action to be played hyperactively, which in turn justifies the use of metrical dramatic verse.

<sup>320</sup> Block, *Speaking The Speech*, 13.

<sup>321</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 76.



medium or character type you're exploring or how far-fetched the realms of the script's 'reality' might be, your choices as an actor can have the same degree of specificity that you'd apply to psychological realism, if you simply engage your creative imagination"<sup>322</sup>.

If we expect actors to play such characters and situations truthfully then there is every reason to expect dramatists to write them truthfully as well. According to the principle of hyperactivity, being a legendary hero does not 'licence' a character to speak in verse. I could write a play in which every character was drawn from the pantheon of Greek gods but, unless the characters engaged in actions that required hyperactivity, the use of metrical verse would remain both unjustified and unhelpful to the player of the game. However, the large-scale Industrial Actions in which mythical characters are involved – especially when condensed into a single evening's entertainment – are likely to require dramatic hyperactivity. Viewed in this light, a mythical narrative might be understood, not as a licence to use dramatic verse 'untruthfully', but as a lusory arena which demands the kind of 'truth' that dramatic verse can offer.

#### 2.4 The Motion in Poetry Metaphor

If the specialist function of metrical dramatic verse is to enable or facilitate hyperactive performance choices, then there must be specific features or qualities – peculiar to metrical verse – that distinguish its hyperactive potential from that of dramatic prose. The distinguishing feature of metrical verse is metre. If such verse

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<sup>322</sup> Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 116.

is capable of something – anything – that is beyond the scope of prose, then that capability must stem from the nature of metre itself. Whether a sentence is written in verse or prose does not, in itself, change the meaning of that sentence. The effect of metre is rhythmic and the nature of that effect is often understood as an “experience of movement”<sup>323</sup>. If we open up Beum and Shapiro’s *Prosody Handbook*, for example, the first thing we are told is that poetry is an art of “sounds *moving* in time”<sup>324</sup> (my italics). James McAuley describes metrical verse as a “dance of language”<sup>325</sup>. Peter Groves talks of verse as ‘moving’ in “jolts”<sup>326</sup> and “drags”<sup>327</sup>. Cicely Berry discusses the “huge variety of movement”<sup>328</sup> in Shakespeare’s verse. George T. Wright frequently explains the effects metre in terms of ‘movement’<sup>329</sup>. So ubiquitous, so “conventional”<sup>330</sup> is the habit of discussing verse in terms of movement that the potential significance of the relationship between the two might easily go unnoticed. However, I suggest that it is precisely this heightened capacity for movement that distinguishes our experiences of metrical verse from those relating to naturalistic prose.

When we say that verse moves we are not speaking literally. Reading, performing and listening to metrical verse does involve movement: my eyes move as I read the words on the page, my lips move as I say the words out loud, the air moves between my mouth and the listener’s ear, but this does not seem to capture what we mean or what we experience when we talk of prosodic movement, nor do

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<sup>323</sup> Derek Attridge, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry*, (Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

<sup>324</sup> Beum and Shapiro, *The Prosody Handbook*, 1.

<sup>325</sup> James J. McAuley, *Versification* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1966), 33.

<sup>326</sup> Peter Groves, *Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare: A Guide for Readers and Actors* (Clayton, Australia: Monash University Publishing, 2013), 84.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>328</sup> Berry, *The Actor And The Text*, 80.

<sup>329</sup> e.g. Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 56.

<sup>330</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 170.

these observations do anything to distinguish the movements of verse from the movements of prose. When I describe a line of verse as ‘skipping along’, neither I nor the words are actually skipping, and yet the description ‘feels’ both truthful and accurate. To understand and experience verse rhythm as physical movement is “the sensorimotor structuring of subjective experience”<sup>331</sup>; an example of what Lakoff and Johnson call Conceptual Metaphor. Such metaphors are not merely linguistic or poetic: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”<sup>332</sup> and, moreover, “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature”<sup>333</sup>. This means we do not simply describe verse rhythm as physical movement, we experience verse rhythm as physical movement.

I suggest that this metaphor – ‘verse rhythm is physical movement’ – rests on a deeper, “Primary Metaphor”<sup>334</sup>: ‘rhythm is movement’. Primary Metaphors are understood as arising from childhood experience: “for young children, subjective (nonsensorimotor) experiences and judgements, on the one hand, and sensorimotor experiences, on the other, are so regularly conflated – undifferentiated in experience – that for a time children do not distinguish between the two when they occur”<sup>335</sup>. An example of such a metaphor is “affection is warmth”<sup>336</sup>, with the link between the two domains assumed to be established in childhood interactions with a parent: when a child is cradled or cuddled by its mother, the child experiences the physical warmth of the interaction and the

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<sup>331</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 47.

<sup>332</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>334</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 45.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

emotional ‘warmth’ that accompanies it as one and the same phenomenon. Thus, throughout life, affection continues to be experienced as ‘warm’; and a lack of affection as ‘cold’. This has been linked to a process of “neural recruitment”<sup>337</sup>, in which such experiences become conflated at a neurophysiological level.

Experiences of rhythm and movement may become conflated at an early stage of childhood development, with experiences of creating rhythm (e.g. shaking rattles or clapping hands) and of being affected by rhythm (e.g. being rocked to sleep or jiggled on someone’s knee) are linked to physical movements. Thus we continue to experience rhythm as movement, even if we are not actually moving or being moved at the time. This deep-seated metaphorical association of rhythm and movement is explored by Tiger C. Roholt<sup>338</sup>, who links experiences of musical ‘grooves’ to Merleau-Ponty’s views on embodied perception and “motor intentionality”<sup>339</sup>. Another researcher into perceptions of musical rhythm, N.P.M. Todd, tells us that, “if the spatiotemporal form of certain sensory stimuli are matched to the dynamics of the motor system, then they may evoke a motion of an internal representation, or motor image, of the corresponding synergetic elements of the musculoskeletal system, *even if the musculoskeletal system itself does not move*”<sup>340</sup> (original emphasis).

The psychologist and critic D. W. Harding acknowledges the metaphorical nature of prosodic ‘movement’ and ‘energy’<sup>341</sup> – albeit that his understanding of metaphor

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<sup>337</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 256.

<sup>338</sup> Tiger C. Roholt, *Groove* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 83–103.

<sup>339</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 141.

<sup>340</sup> Neil P. McAngus Todd, ‘Motion in Music: A Neurobiological Perspective’, *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 17, no. 1 (1 October 1999): 115–26.

<sup>341</sup> Denys Wyatt Harding, *Words Into Rhythm: English Speech Rhythm in Verse and Prose* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 101.

predates the work of Lakoff and Johnson – and, when discussing the ‘expressive effects’ of verse rhythm, he argues that, “it is a movement system [incorporating] the extensive and intimate patterns of bodily movement, including incipient movement and posture, in which the speaker’s emotional attitudes express themselves”<sup>342</sup>. This seems to be exactly what Lakoff and Johnson have in mind when they discuss ‘abstract concepts’ being given the “qualitative feel of sensorimotor experience”<sup>343</sup>. The difficulty is in Harding’s insistence that the ‘movement’ of the verse expresses ‘emotional states’. If experiencing verse rhythm as physical movement is just another way of ‘painting the passions’ then it cannot provide an action-based understanding of the role of verse in drama.

In some instances, the ‘movement’ of verse is associated, not with the action-playing or even the emotions of the speaker, but with the movement of the object or person that is being described. When looking at non-dramatic poetry, particularly that written in what Eliot describes as the ‘first voice’ (that of “the poet talking to himself – or to nobody”<sup>344</sup>), this may not give any cause for concern. When, for example, we read, hear or perform Auden’s lines,

This is the Night Mail, crossing the border

Bringing the cheque and the postal order <sup>345</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>343</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 128.

<sup>344</sup> Eliot, *The Three Voices of Poetry*, 1.

<sup>345</sup> Wystan Hugh Auden, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 2007), 132.

it seems natural – desirable, in fact – for us to associate the rhythms of the verse with the sound and movement of a train. This is non-dramatic poetry and the principles of dramatic action-playing cannot be regarded as being of primary importance. Such ‘mimetic’ or ‘onomatopoeic’ interpretations of verse rhythms are, nevertheless, sometimes brought to bear on dramatic verse as well. The following line from *Henry V* will serve as an example:

Swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean (Henry V, 3.1.14)

Barton notes that the ‘swish and swirl’ of the verse imitates the sound and movement of the sea<sup>346</sup>. Whilst this is intuitively credible, such use of movement cannot be the primary function of dramatic verse: it can only apply when there is something being described, the movement of which could be imitated in this way. Moreover, if our aim is to write and interpret metrical dramatic verse on the understanding that it always serves a dramatic purpose then, even when such imitation is appropriate, ‘mimesis’ of this kind cannot be the sole function of the line. To imitate the movement of the sea or of a train, is not, in and of itself, active: it is not something that one character can do to another and is not, therefore, a playable performance choice. This does not invalidate Barton’s assertion, it simply means that, if a Stanislavskian director asks the actor playing Henry, ‘what are you doing to your men at this point?’ the answer ‘I’m imitating the sea at them’ will not, as it were, wash. What we need is a conception of prosodic movement that is not

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<sup>346</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, 42.

simply 'expressive' but performative, in which metrical dramatic is integral to the "individual and constantly changing speech-acts of the characters"<sup>347</sup>.

Contemporary understandings of performative speech-acts owe a great deal to the linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin. Austin distinguishes three categories of speech-act: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary<sup>348</sup>. A locutionary act is a speech-act in the most obvious sense in that it is an "act of saying something"<sup>349</sup>. An illocutionary act is the "performance of an act *in* saying something"<sup>350</sup> (original emphasis): a speech-act wherein the utterance of the words constitutes, by virtue of conventional rules, the performance of an action. An example is 'to make a promise'. In uttering the words, 'I promise to send the material tomorrow', I have performed the action of making a promise. Whether or not I keep the promise does not alter the fact that a promise has been made. Anyone viewing a transcript of the conversation in which those particular speech sounds were made would agree that such an illocutionary act had been performed. The third category of perlocutionary acts is where I believe that action-playing in the Stanislavskian sense – and perhaps the performative potential of metrical verse – comes to the fore. A perlocutionary act is not reliant on conventions of meaning, rather it is an act that produces "certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention or purpose of producing them"<sup>351</sup>. In other words, perlocutionary acts are those by which one person speaks in order to affect another. Because

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<sup>347</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 187.

<sup>348</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 94–108.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

“perlocutionary acts are not conventional”<sup>352</sup> (though they may utilise conventional speech acts in order to achieve certain effects) they can be performed by nonverbal means including facial expressions, tones of voice and body language<sup>353</sup>.

As an example, the illocutionary act of making a threat might form a part of the perlocutionary act of intimidating, but the latter could be achieved without the former being performed and, by the same token, the former act could be performed without achieving the latter. As a result, that a perlocutionary act was performed cannot be established as a ‘fact’ simply by viewing a transcript of a conversation: “Yes, a threat was made but whether or not that was done with the intention of intimidating and whether or not it had that effect remains an open question.” Because such acts rely on the response of the person who has been acted upon, we must allow for the possibility of a mismatch between the intention (the perlocutionary object) and the actual response (the perlocutionary sequel).

For such acts to be achieved or imitated in drama requires acting in a way that the performance of illocutionary acts does not. If the line is, “If they find me, I promise you a fight – a devil of a fight!”<sup>354</sup>, and the actor manages to say those words out loud, in that order, then the character has performed the illocutionary act of making a promise: no acting required. If in making that promise the character is ‘to intimidate’ or ‘to impress’ the other character in the scene then the actor will need

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>353</sup> Nonverbal means could be used to perform an illocutionary act but only if those means existed as part of a conventional sign-system.

<sup>354</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 6.



to act. That is, the actor will need to play an activity by making and executing a plausible and playable performance choice.

If an experience of movement generated by verse rhythm is to be understood as the execution of a perlocutionary act, then there must be a connection between 'sensations of physical movement' and the performance of dramatic activities.

### Metaphors We Act By: *The Laban-Malmgren System*

In order to understand the connection between physical, or psychophysical, 'sensations' and Stanislavskian action-playing, I turn my attention to the *Laban-Malmgren System* of actor training. This approach is at the heart of the acting and directing programmes at Drama Centre London, and was developed by one of the school's founding teachers, Yat Malmgren, as an extension and adaptation of the 'movement psychology' work of Rudolf Laban and his late-life collaborator William Carpenter. Though Malmgren started teaching the System in the 1950s, Mirodan's 1997 thesis was the first document to make this work available to those beyond the classrooms of Malmgren and his former students. As a result, the System is not as widely known as Laban's earlier work. However, many of those trained in the *Laban-Malmgren System* are prominent figures, with Anthony Hopkins, Colin Firth, Anne-Marie Duff, Adrian Noble, Penelope Wilton, Pierce Brosnan, Helen McCrory, Michael Fassbender and Tom Hardy amongst those to have been trained by Malmgren and his successors.

Whilst the majority of the concepts found in the *Laban-Malmgren System* are present in Laban's *The Mastery of Movement*, "by linking Laban's and Carpenter's work to Stanislavskian thinking on character and action... Malmgren struck out on his own, developing what Carpenter had conceived as a general 'movement psychology' into a narrower, yet coherent and useable training System **for actors**"<sup>355</sup> (original emphasis). The System is based on a "deceptively simple idea: between certain psychological and certain physical functions there is a direct correspondence."<sup>356</sup> This simple idea has wide-ranging implications for the acting process, but I will focus on only one aspect of the *Laban-Malmgren System*: the way in which it enriches and adds to the notion of dramatic activities.

Dramatic activities can be described using transitive verbs: 'to charm', 'to coax', 'to shame', etc. Such descriptions tell us what a character is doing, but they don't tell us how those activities are being played. 'To charm', for example, might be played in a number of different ways. A 'silky' kind of charming might be very different to a jocular, 'impish' version of the activity. We might, therefore, modify the description of an activity: 'to charm impishly' for example. The director Harold Clurman describes these additions as "adjustments"<sup>357</sup> – offering examples such as "to tantalize staunchly"<sup>358</sup> – and Carnicke uses the term "adaptation"<sup>359</sup>. Drawing on the 'deceptively simple idea' of linking psychological and physical functions, actors trained in the *Laban-Malmgren System* learn to conceptualise these 'adjustments' as purposeful movements of the human body.

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<sup>355</sup> Mirodan, 'Acting the Metaphor', 30–45.

<sup>356</sup> Mirodan, 'The Way of Transformation', 12.

<sup>357</sup> Clurman, *On Directing*, 80.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>359</sup> Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 213.

Laban describes physical movement in terms of four dimensions, which he christens his 'Motion Factors': Weight, Space, Time and Flow<sup>360</sup>. Each Motion Factor has a Contending element and a Yielding element:

Weight is Strong or Light

Space is Direct or Flexible

Time is Quick or Sustained

Flow is Bound or Free

Using these terms, physical movements can be categorised into a series of eight 'basic' Working Actions<sup>361</sup>:

Strong/Direct/Quick <sup>362</sup>	=	Punching
Strong/Direct/Sustained	=	Pressing
Strong/Flexible/Quick	=	Slashing
Strong/Flexible/Sustained	=	Wringing
Light/Direct/Quick	=	Dabbing

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<sup>360</sup> Laban, *The Mastery of Movement*, 85.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>362</sup> The convention of using forward slashes in these descriptions is adopted from Laban and is an indication that the order in which the elements are listed is reversible and that the relative prominence of each Motion Factor is variable.

Light/Direct/Sustained	=	Gliding
Light/Flexible/Quick	=	Flicking
Light/Flexible/Sustained	=	Floating

Each Working Action is also characterised by its 'Flow', or 'viscosity' of movement, which can be either 'Free' or 'Bound'. A Working Action is 'Free' if it displays "a streaming, unarrestable fluidity of movement"<sup>363</sup> and 'Bound' if it displays a "constant readiness to stop"<sup>364</sup>.

Within the *Laban-Malmgren System*, activities are described in terms of Working Actions. So, for example, my activity might be 'to charm Glidingly' or 'to intimidate Pressingly'. The Working Actions are 'archetypal' movements and so I can make the description more specific by personalising the movement. Instead of linking the activity 'to charm' to a generic Glide (Light/Direct/Sustained), I can link the activity to a particular Glide: 'stroking a cat', for example. I can personalise the movement further by imagining, not just stroking any old cat, but stroking a particular cat, in a particular way, on a particular occasion. The aim is to find a specific movement that 'captures' the quality of the specific activity that I am playing. Thus each and every activity can be described in terms of a particular physical action.

The movements are not merely descriptions, they are Conceptual Metaphors. Actors understand and experience dramatic activities as purposeful movements of

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<sup>363</sup> Rudolf Laban and William Carpenter, cited in Fettes, *A Peopled Labyrinth*, 332.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

the human body. The metaphorical nature of the *Laban-Malngren System* has been identified by Mirodan, who defines the ‘foundational metaphor’ of the System as: “psychological action is physical action”<sup>365</sup>. Rick Kemp also discusses Laban’s Working Actions as embodied metaphorical concepts<sup>366</sup>. This conflation of mental and physical behaviour is in step with Conceptual Metaphor Theory and with contemporary theories of embodied cognition, which reject the Cartesian separation of mind and body, spirit and substance<sup>367</sup>. Such notions of embodiment have had a profound influence on twenty-first century performance theory and practice, with commentators such as Bruce McConachie<sup>368</sup>, Rhonda Blair<sup>369</sup> and John Lutterbie<sup>370</sup> seeking to re-examine the embodied, cognitive processes of theatrical performance and practitioner-theoreticians such as Carnicke<sup>371</sup>, Merlin<sup>372</sup> and Kemp<sup>373</sup> reemphasising the embodied, experiential, and psychophysical aspects of acting and action-playing.

For the actor, the experiential truth of the *Laban-Malngren System*’s ‘foundational metaphor’ is realised in the twin concepts of ‘effort’ and ‘action’. ‘Effort’ is defined as “the inner impulses from which movement originates”<sup>374</sup> and I suggest that it may be glossed as, ‘the first-person experiences of impulses towards action and

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<sup>365</sup> Mirodan, ‘Acting the Metaphor’, 40.

<sup>366</sup> Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 50.

<sup>367</sup> See, for example, Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*; Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling Of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*, (San Diego: Vintage, 2000); Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008); Alva Noe, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010).

<sup>368</sup> Bruce McConachie, *Theatre and Mind* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>369</sup> Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*, (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>370</sup> John Lutterbie, *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>371</sup> Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 185–206.

<sup>372</sup> Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), 3–9.

<sup>373</sup> Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 13–20.

<sup>374</sup> Laban, *The Mastery of Movement*, 10.

the expenditure of psychophysical energy within the playing of an action'. The definition of 'action' is "a bodily movement [including an act of speech] expressed through the Motion Factors of Weight, Space, Time and Flow: performed for a functional purpose with a measure of conscious volition"<sup>375</sup>. In terms of 'effort', an activity will be understood and experienced by the actor as an 'inner sensation' of movement. In terms of action, that same quality of movement will 'infuse' the physical and vocal behaviour of the performer. By virtue of the System's 'foundational metaphor', then, playing my activity 'to charm strokingly' will engender a psychophysical experience of 'stroking' in me as the performer ('effort') *and* transmit a 'stroking energy' through my purposeful vocal and physical behaviour ('action'). This 'energy' is used to affect the other person/character in the scene: I 'charm' the other person by 'stroking' them.

One of the practical upshots of this for an actor is that, by 'acting out the metaphor' – that is, by enacting or 'miming' a physical stroking movement – I can generate the psychophysical sensation of 'effort' associated with my activity 'to charm'. This 'acting out' of the metaphor thus becomes part of the actor's preparation and rehearsal process. Rather than simply 'imagining' what it would be like to play this particular activity in these particular dramatic circumstances and then trying to translate this 'psychological' preparation into performance, I can use the physical action to get the psychophysical sensation of playing the activity 'alive in my body' – or rather, alive in my "bodymind". Once I have generated the psychophysical sensation of 'effort', I can use it to inform my rehearsal of the vocal and physical

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<sup>375</sup> Laban and Carpenter, cited in Fettes, *A Peopled Labyrinth*, 1–2.

performance of the activity, so that my delivery of the text comes to embody the 'energy' of the movement.

The *Laban-Malmgren System* is by no means the only method of actor training to exploit the psychophysical nature of performance and action-playing. Kemp notes that "the last thirty years has seen a growth of interest in physical and holistic actor training"<sup>376</sup> and argues that in order to reconcile Stanislavskian notions of acting with contemporary theories of embodiment and the recent findings of neuroscientific research we need to look to Stanislavsky's later work concerning physical actions, to the development of that work by practitioners such as Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Michael Chekhov, and to physical approaches such as those of Grotowski and Lecoq, as well as those that stem from Laban<sup>377</sup>. His research supports the idea that, "training that foregrounds the body does not necessarily neglect the mental activities generally termed 'psychological'. Instead, it grounds them in action."<sup>378</sup> My contention is that the language of the *Laban-Malmgren System* and the Conceptual Metaphor at its heart, provide a coherent understanding of embodied action-playing that is particularly well-suited to exploring the hyperactive potential of metrical dramatic verse.

The 'foundational metaphor' of the *Laban-Malmgren System* allows actors to understand and experience dramatic activities as physical movements and, more specifically, as purposeful movements of the human body. I have identified another metaphor that allows us to understand and experience verse rhythm as physical

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<sup>376</sup> Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 20.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–13.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

movement. Conceptual metaphors are “like atoms that can be put together to form molecules”<sup>379</sup>. By conflating the metaphors ‘verse rhythm is physical movement’ and ‘psychological action is physical action’ we create the ‘metaphorical molecule’ to which I shall refer as the Motion in Poetry Metaphor.

If the rhythm of a particular line of metrical verse is understood and experienced as a physical movement and if that same physical movement is used to understand and experience the psychophysical sensation of a particular dramatic activity, then we can understand and experience verse rhythm as embodying dramatic action. If, for example, my activity is ‘to charm strokingly’ and if the line of verse – the lusory tool – I am using to play that activity has rhythmic qualities that are experienced as a ‘stroking’ movement, then the ‘movement’ of the verse and the ‘movement’ of the activity are one and the same thing. Moreover, if metrical verse can generate experiential qualities of movement in the speaker (‘effort’) and embody those qualities of movement in the performance of the line (‘action’) in a manner that is beyond the capacity of naturalistic prose then the dramatic function of such verse is not only active but hyperactive.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides an explanation as to why readers, writers and performers of metrical verse might conceptualise its rhythms in terms of physical movement, but if we are to incorporate the principles of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor into a specialist version of the Stanislavskian acting game then we must have a clearer understanding of how our embodied interactions with metrical verse give rise to these experiences. If metrical dramatic verse has

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<sup>379</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 60.



hyperactive potential, then we must understand how and why the experiences of movement associated with metrical verse differ from experiences of naturalistic prose. We must also re-examine the rules of our game. An action-based approach to the interpretation of metrical dramatic verse must continue to be governed by the rules of plausibility and playability. However, the process of ascribing physical movements to particular verse constructions might be considered a game in itself and, unless our interpretations of verse rhythm are to be 'purely subjective' or arbitrarily prescriptive, then this nested game-within-a-game must be governed by constitutive rules of its own. Understanding these aspects of the Verse Psychology Game – and the nature of its rules – is the primary aim of the following chapter.

## Chapter 3: Rhythm Games

### 3.1 Finding a Rhythm

#### Cognitive Poetics

In order to further explore the structure and the mechanics of the Verse Psychology Game, I draw on the cognitive poetics of Reuven Tsur and on his theory of “rhythmical performance”<sup>380</sup> in particular. There are three main reasons for my decision to adopt and, to a certain extent, adapt Tsur’s model:

1. Tsur’s theory of rhythmical performance offers a coherent and useful explanation of how the rhythms of metrical verse actually work, especially within the verse form that has dominated English-language versification since the C15th: iambic pentameter. Tsur’s cognitive model has significant advantages over ‘traditional’ humanist metrics (of which George T. Wright<sup>381</sup> is one notable contemporary exponent), the generative and, indeed, “post-generative”<sup>382</sup> systems of metrical analysis stemming from the influential work of Halle and Keyser<sup>383</sup>, and the model of ‘beat prosody’ developed by Derek Attridge<sup>384</sup>.

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<sup>380</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 19.

<sup>381</sup> George T. Wright, *Hearing the Measures: Shakespearean and Other Inflections* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

<sup>382</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 13.

<sup>383</sup> Morris Halle and Samuel Jay Keyser, *English Stress; Its Form, Its Growth, and Its Role in Verse* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>384</sup> Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge University Press, 1979); Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm*; Attridge, *Moving Words*.

2. Although Tsur does not discuss the idea of game-playing explicitly, his approach to metre echoes the structure of a game. As a result, the 'game' of rhythmical performance may be incorporated within the larger game-structures of 'Verse Psychology' and 'Stanislavskian acting'.
3. I suggest that it is mutually beneficial for the principles of rhythmical performance to be aligned with the concept of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor. On the one hand, Tsur's theory, combined with the notion of conceptual metaphor, provides a coherent explanation as to how and why a performer's embodied interactions with metrical verse might give rise to experiences of physical movement, thereby lending additional support to my theoretical model. On the other hand, I argue that Tsur's explanation of the cognitive principles underpinning the perception of verse rhythm can be enriched and improved by the discussion of verse rhythm's embodied and experiential nature offered by the Motion in Poetry Metaphor.

Tsur began the study of cognitive poetics in the 1970s<sup>385</sup> and has continued to develop and test his theories over the past forty years. During that time, and particularly since the turn of this century, interest in cognitive poetics has grown considerably, as evidenced in the works of Peter Stockwell<sup>386</sup>, Mark Turner<sup>387</sup>, Brone and Vandaele<sup>388</sup>, Semino and Culpeper<sup>389</sup>, and Gavins and Steen<sup>390</sup>, amongst others. Whilst Tsur's focus has been on poetry, sound patterns and –

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<sup>385</sup> Tsur, *A Perception-Oriented Theory of Metre*.

<sup>386</sup> Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>387</sup> Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language*, (Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>388</sup> Jeroen Vandaele and Geert Brone, eds., *Cognitive Poetics: Goals, Gains and Gaps* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009).

<sup>389</sup> Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper, eds., *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>390</sup> Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen, *Cognitive Poetics in Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003).

crucially, for my purposes – verse rhythm, others have expanded the field to include a wide range of literature and literary styles. Despite this variety of interests, and an accompanying variety of approaches, there are certain core principles that tie together these different strands of inquiry. These principles include:

**Experientialism:** “the view that there is a world outside the body that exists... but our only access to it is through our perceptual and cognitive experience of it”<sup>391</sup>.

**Generalisation:** The principle that “there are common aspects of humanity so that... the broad window of human possibilities is constrained by the common way in which our minds work and our bodies interact with reality”<sup>392</sup>.

**Embodiment:** The principle that the human mind is an embodied mind and that, as a result, “the physical material and sensible world and the abstract idealised and conceptual world are intimately bound together: mind/body dualism is rejected”<sup>393</sup>.

Such principles play a vital role in the cognitive poetics advanced by Tsur and in the Verse Psychology Game. In insisting that all literary works are “the combined products of texts and readers in particular configurations”<sup>394</sup>, cognitive poetics is a form of reader-response criticism and can therefore be associated with the

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<sup>391</sup> Peter Stockwell, *Texture - a Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

tradition of reception theorists such as Wolfgang Iser<sup>395</sup> and Stanley Fish<sup>396</sup>.

However, by situating the reading process within established models of embodied cognition it avoids recourse to an “ideal”<sup>397</sup>, “perfect”<sup>398</sup> or “super”<sup>399</sup> reader – to the kind of reader that, as Terry Eagleton puts it, “need not do anything so humdrum as actually exist”<sup>400</sup> – and instead considers “a real reader, who could and often does exist, a reader with a mind and a body”<sup>401</sup>.

### Dance Partners: The Neutral Line and the Natural Line

According to Tsur, the rhythm of metrical verse is made up of three components: “prose rhythm, metric pattern and performance”<sup>402</sup>. A similar observation was made by Wellek and Warren<sup>403</sup> in the mid-twentieth century, and Antony Easthope reports that, towards the end of that century, scholars had reached a “general agreement”<sup>404</sup> on this point. However, many theories of metre based on this notion have tended to prioritise the first two elements or to conflate the second and third, talking of “meter vs. actualisation, abstract frame vs. actual instance, schema or

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<sup>395</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

<sup>396</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>397</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 144.

<sup>398</sup> Frank Raymond Leavis, *Education and the University: A Sketch for an ‘English School’* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 70.

<sup>399</sup> Michael Riffaterre, ‘Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire’s *Les Chats*’, *Yale French Studies*, no. 36/37 (1966), 215.

<sup>400</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 121.

<sup>401</sup> Stockwell, *Texture - a Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*, 137.

<sup>402</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 7.

<sup>403</sup> René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), 170.

<sup>404</sup> Antony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1990), 61.

‘normative fact’ vs. particular, etc.”<sup>405</sup>. Tsur, however, maintains that all three elements must be given equal consideration.

The metric pattern – or **Neutral Line**<sup>406</sup> as I will call it – is the ‘fixed pattern’ of the verse form. The Neutral Line of iambic pentameter, for example, can be represented like this:

w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S

This Neutral Line has ten metrical positions arranged into five feet, with each foot containing a weak metrical position followed by a strong metrical position. This pattern is constant. It is also devoid of linguistic content: it is not made up of syllables or speech sounds. The Neutral Line is a nonverbal construct and can be described as silent. I prefer this term to “abstract”<sup>407</sup>, which suggests something disembodied or ‘unreal’. I argue that, on the contrary, the rhythmic pattern of the Neutral Line can be ‘felt’ as an internally structured, embodied experience. Tsur suggests that a reader’s knowledge of a metrical form is best described as a “perceptual hypothesis”<sup>408</sup>; if so, what this hypothesis anticipates is not an abstract relationship between a theoretical pattern and a collection of syllables but an embodied perception: the experience of the Neutral Line pattern or, to apply the

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<sup>405</sup> Seymour Chatman and Samuel Levin, *Essays on the Language of Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 69–70.

<sup>406</sup> Tsur’s *Poetic Rhythm* brings together work carried out over several decades and Tsur declares that the creation of the book involved a good deal of ‘copy and paste’ (p.1). Perhaps for this reason, his use of terminology and the definitions he provides for certain terms are, at times, inconsistent. In the pursuit of clarity and consistency I have developed, and will here employ, some terms of my own.

<sup>407</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 22.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Motion in Poetry Metaphor, the experience of a particular pattern of movement. I will therefore discuss a performer's conception of the Neutral Line pattern not as an 'abstract idea' but as the 'neutral form' of an "experiential gestalt"<sup>409</sup>; that is, as "an organised, unified whole within our experience and understanding that manifests a repeatable pattern or structure"<sup>410</sup>

The 'prose rhythm' – or **Natural Line** – is the way in which a particular arrangement of syllables, words, phrases, etc., might be spoken within a particular (dramatic) context but without reference to the text being treated as verse. Put simply, it is how the text might be performed 'naturally'. When it comes to assessing the Natural Line structure of a text I will, throughout this study, assume a level of "communicative competence"<sup>411</sup> on the part of the reader; that is, I will rely on the reader's tacit knowledge of grammar, linguistics and pragmatics rather than formulating or expounding explicit rules for assigning levels of 'stress'<sup>412</sup> to a word or syllable, grouping words into intonational-phrases, determining the presence, duration and positioning of pauses within an utterance, etc. I will also assume that it is within the competence of the reader/performer to assess the content of a line (i.e. the meaning of the words) and to make appropriate performance choices in response<sup>413</sup>. Whereas the Neutral Line pattern remains constant, the Natural Line pattern is constantly changing. Just as it is misleading to

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<sup>409</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 41.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>411</sup> Michael Canale, 'From Communicative Competence to Communicative Language Pedagogy' in Jack C. Richards and R. W. Schmidt, eds., *Language and Communication* (London: Routledge, 2014), 2.

<sup>412</sup> I use the term 'stress' to describe the degree of prominence a syllable receives in an utterance, regardless of how such prominence might be achieved in performance (loudness, pitch, inflection, etc.).

<sup>413</sup> It is therefore assumed that the meaning of a line will guide and inform performance choices that respond to the metrical and rhythmical considerations of the construction.

discuss the Neutral Line as being made up of syllables, it is equally misleading to describe the Natural Line as containing metrical positions or feet.

The relationship between the patterns of the Neutral Line and the Natural Line is one of differing degrees of “convergence and divergence”<sup>414</sup>. If the ten metrical positions of the Neutral Line are matched by ten syllables in the Natural Line, the strong positions matched by strong stresses, and the pattern of articulation in the Natural Line matches the internal structure of the Neutral Line, then this will be an instance of convergence. If we look at this line from *Troilus and Cressida*:

w----S    w----S    w----S    w----S    w----S    (*Neutral Line*)<sup>415</sup>

Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice    (Troilus & Cressida, 1.1.53)

we can see that the Natural Line pattern converges with that of the Neutral Line. Each of the ten metrical positions is matched with a syllable. The weak metrical positions are matched with relatively weak stresses and the strong metrical positions are matched with relatively strong stresses. The internal structure of the Neutral Line (positions, feet, line-ending) is matched by the internal structure of the Natural Line. If, however, we look at this line:

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<sup>414</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 33.

<sup>415</sup> The number of dashes between ‘w’ and ‘S’ vary from the previous representation only to maintain visual alignment with the words and should not be taken as indicating a variation within the pattern.



w----S w---S w---S w-----S w---S

(*Neutral Line*)

**Wishing** me like to one more rich in hope

(Sonnet 29, 5)

we notice an instance of divergence. The first metrical position ('weak') is matched with a relatively strong stress and the second metrical position ('strong') is matched with a relatively weak stress. This construction is what is known in the parlance of humanist metrics as an 'initial trochaic inversion'. This is fairly low-level divergence. In principle, a given Natural Line could diverge from the Neutral Line pattern at any or all of the metrical positions. Even in a Natural Line that does seem to match (or converge with) the weak and strong positions of the Neutral Line, levels of stress are far from uniform: the strong stresses in a line might not deliver equal amounts of 'strength'. Brian Boyd's calculation that, allowing for only three levels of stress, one could create 59,049 variations within the stress pattern of a ten syllable line<sup>416</sup> does not take into consideration any variation in the number of syllables or in the way that those syllables are organised (pause patterns, etc.).

Most metrical theorists recognise that a verse form such as iambic pentameter involves some sort of regular pattern, and that the particular patterns of lines written 'in' that verse form can 'fit with' the regular pattern to a greater or lesser extent. However, a number of questions divide metrical theories. From my perspective, two of the most pressing are:

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<sup>416</sup> Boyd, *Why Lyrics Last*, 37.

- What effect, if any, does the relationship between these two patterns have on performance?

And

- To what extent, and in which ways, can the two patterns diverge before the verse line is ruled 'unmetrical'?

Tsur's answers to these questions have a profound effect on the attitude to metre espoused in this thesis.

### 3.2 Rhythmical Performance

#### Whose Line is it Anyway?

For Tsur, performance is not merely an afterthought – a vocal reconstruction of a rhythm 'inherent' in the text – nor is metricality an abstract conundrum to be solved with pen and paper. It is only in performance that verse rhythm and metricality come into existence. A rhythmical performance is one in which the vocal conditions allow the Neutral Line and Natural Line patterns to be "simultaneously accessible to awareness"<sup>417</sup>. Tsur explores the kinds of vocal conditions that would make such performance possible on the basis of a core set of principles governing cognition and perception. One such principle is the limited capacity of the short-term (or working) memory, which is constrained both by time span (duration) and

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<sup>417</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 8.

by the amount of information that can be processed within it (load). This means that “in order to render a verse line perceptible as a rhythmic whole, the reciter must manipulate his vocal resources in such a way that the verse line can be completed before its beginning fades out in the short-term memory”<sup>418</sup>.

In requiring the simultaneous perception of two patterns, verse rhythm makes greater demands on our mental processing capacity than prose (in which there is no Neutral Line pattern to perceive). In order to succeed in creating a rhythmical performance, then, one would be well advised to employ vocal devices that free up mental processing space. These include “grouping and clear-cut articulation”<sup>419</sup>, saving the processing space that is spent decoding speech sounds within the “rather careless articulation”<sup>420</sup> of everyday conversation. The greater the degree of divergence between the two patterns, the more mental processing space will be required to maintain awareness of those patterns, *ergo* more processing space will need to be freed up. This leads Tsur to state that “the more marked the deviation, the more emphatically the devices of grouping and over-articulation will be deployed”<sup>421</sup>.

Tsur also draws on gestalt theory<sup>422</sup>. A gestalt is a unified form or shape. Gestalt theory explores the tendency and capacity of the human perceptual system to generate such perceptual ‘wholes’ out of smaller and potentially unrelated perceptual stimuli. Once a gestalt has been formed it takes on a perceptual

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 49–55.

‘existence’ that goes beyond its status as a collection of smaller units (‘the whole is other than the sum of its parts’). This notion, however, entails a “complex relationship between a whole and its parts”<sup>423</sup>, with the former relying on the internal structure (subdivision) provided by the latter and yet maintaining its status as a unified (undivided) perceptual ‘object’. Gestalt principles have been applied to the processes of perception in music<sup>424</sup> and the visual arts<sup>425</sup> and, more recently, linked to the role of “image schemata”<sup>426</sup> in embodied perception and cognition<sup>427</sup>.

The principle, then, is that the line is the primary unit of versification and that, in order to be perceived as such, the verse line must operate as a gestalt. On the page, the integrity of the line is preserved graphically: the line is printed as a *line*. Tsur explores the ways in which the gestalt of the verse line might operate in performance. A key gestalt principle is that “psychological organisation will always be as ‘good’ as the prevailing conditions allow,” with the term ‘good’ embracing “such properties as regularity, symmetry, simplicity”<sup>428</sup>. A ‘good’ gestalt will have a ‘good’ internal structure. Tsur echoes Meyer in insisting “that ‘good shape’ does not necessarily mean ‘artistically good’”<sup>429</sup>. Artists, whatever their medium, might have good reason to disrupt, challenge and threaten the integrity of their gestalts and the ease with which such forms can be perceived. Indeed, some of the greatest artistic effects might result from encouraging the form to “tremble on the brink of chaos”<sup>430</sup>. It is perhaps to avoid the implied value judgment of ‘good’ that

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>424</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (University of Chicago Press, 1961).

<sup>425</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).

<sup>426</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 4.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 41–64.

<sup>428</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 87.

<sup>429</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 50.

<sup>430</sup> Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 161.

Tsur employs 'simplicity' as a catchall term, underlying qualities such as "symmetry, similarity, regularity, balance, clear-cut contrast, distinct outlines, etc."<sup>431</sup>:

In an absolute sense a thing is simple when it consists of a small number of structural features. In a relative sense, a thing has simplicity when it organises complex material with the smallest possible number of structural features... Both senses have their proper use in metrical analysis.<sup>432</sup>

When it comes to a line of metrical verse, the 'simplest' organisation (in the absolute sense) is the internal structure of the Neutral Line itself. In the Neutral Line of iambic pentameter, for example, the elements are organised into an ordered hierarchy (line, foot, position) of clear-cut, regular subunits, with the five feet being the smallest number of features into which the line can be divided without creating irregularity in the size or shape of subunits<sup>433</sup>. It follows that the surest way of maintaining the gestalt of the verse line in performance is to impose the Neutral Line structure onto the text wholesale: 'regularising' the speech stresses into two levels (weak and strong), articulating the feet as clear-cut, regular subunits and pausing at the end of each line ('end-stopping'). To take such an approach to the opening soliloquy of *Richard III* would result in a performance like this:

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<sup>431</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 50.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> The structural organisation of iambic pentameter is explored in detail below.

now-IS the-WIN ter-OF our-DIS con-TENT |

made-GLOR ious-SUMM er-BY this-SON of-YORK |

(Richard III, 1.1.1-2)

Undoubtedly, such a performance maintains the perception of the line as unit but in so doing it violates the first principle of rhythmical performance: the Neutral and Natural Line patterns must both be 'accessible to awareness'. In this rendition the Natural Line pattern is obliterated.

There is, however, a less extreme version of this approach to performance which may well have a place in our Verse Psychology Game. George T. Wright suggests that as performers we must often 'tilt' the phrasing of the line in the direction of the metre and that "if we fail to do so the divergence is likely to be so extreme that we hear a hodgepodge"<sup>434</sup>. The creation of a 'hodgepodge' being the disintegration of the gestalt. Such 'tilting' might involve giving a little extra speech stress to a 'weak' syllable that is matched with a strong metrical position, thereby 'regularising' the internal structure of the gestalt. The tendency to 'tilt' is what Tsur calls a "convergent delivery style"<sup>435</sup>, so-called because the performer's response to instances of divergence is to minimise them as much as possible. This is opposed to a "divergent delivery style"<sup>436</sup> in which instances of divergence are emphasised. Individual performers may tend towards one or other of these styles but, in

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<sup>434</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare's Metrical Art*, 11.

<sup>435</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 414.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

practice, an accomplished performer will need to adapt to the particular conditions of particular lines. As we have observed in looking at lines from *Richard III*, too convergent a delivery style will destroy the Natural Line and so at least some degree of divergence will need to be incorporated into a rhythmical performance.

In maintaining the gestalt of the verse line, performers might seek to achieve organisational simplicity in the relative rather than the absolute sense of the term. Given the complexity of verse lines as perceptual material, providing the gestalt with a relatively simple internal structure might involve 'irregular' subdivision and, therefore, divergence from the structure provided by the Neutral Line. Such reorganisation is predicted by the principles of gestalt theory and Tsur offers the following explanation:

If possible, the mind will tend to perpetuate an initial pattern. If, however, no such initial pattern is readily perceptible or the 'linguistic givens' of the line resist the imposition of the particular perceptual pattern, the reader's mind will not 'give up' and 'rule' the line unmetrical; it will rather be inclined to perform such groupings of stresses in which no one-to-one correspondence of stress and position is detectable.<sup>437</sup>

One example of such a 'grouping of stresses' is what Tsur calls a "stress valley"<sup>438</sup> – what in more traditional terminology is described as a trochee-iamb combination:

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 11.

this means an instance in which the pattern of speech stress is STRONG-weak-weak-STRONG. In Juliet's famous line:

**Gallop apace** you fiery-footed steeds

(Romeo and Juliet, 3.2.1)

the 'linguistic givens' of the first two words seem to 'resist' the imposition of the Neutral Line pattern: "ga-LLOP a-PACE" would create a simple, convergent beginning to the line but would destroy the pattern of the Natural Line. According to the view given here, however, it is not enough in such circumstances to simply follow the 'natural' prose delivery of the words. To do so would jeopardise the Neutral Line pattern (which must remain 'accessible to awareness') and the gestalt of the verse line. Tsur's system of rhythmical performance relies on the principle that, when the internal structure of the gestalt diverges from that of the Neutral Line, relative simplicity can be achieved if "the resistant shape is isolated as a metrical figure [and is given] a sufficiently strong shape to stand out against the rhythmical background"<sup>439</sup>. This would mean the speech sounds of the 'stress valley' being emphatically grouped together and segregated as a divergent subunit of the gestalt. The creation of the 'figure' highlights or foregrounds the divergence between the two patterns. Its strong shape and clear-cut articulation saves mental processing space and the emphatic grouping reduces the number of subunits within the gestalt, thereby producing relative simplicity. That is, the internal structure is made as simple as the complex material will allow.

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 51–52.



The performance of a 'stress valley' is one example of a performer providing "a perceptual solution to a perceptual problem"<sup>440</sup>. Such 'problem-solving' is the essence of rhythmical performance. Every instance of divergence between the Neutral Line and the Natural Line, however minor, presents the performer with some sort of 'perceptual problem', in that the two patterns need to be 'present' within a single performance. A rhythmical performance provides a perceptual solution through a series of more or less convergent and divergent performance choices, drawing the rhythm of the verse towards and away from the structure of the Neutral Line. The performance that emerges is neither of the two patterns, nor can it be described as the two patterns 'grafted together'. It is its own pattern, born of the performer's embodied interactions with the text. The emphatic grouping and articulation of a figure such as a 'stress valley' is demanded by neither of the two patterns in isolation: the rhythm of the verse is created in the performance choices of the reader.

What the 'rules' of rhythmical performance require is a perceptual solution, not *the* perceptual solution. A performer's perception of any given text is constrained by the processes of embodied cognition. Tsur therefore assumes that any rhythmical performance is "determined by [the text] to a considerable extent [whilst also] leaving room for considerable creativity on the performer's part"<sup>441</sup>. Whilst there might be any number of 'non-rhythmical' ways of performing a particular verse construction, perceptual responses to the same construction could give rise to multiple performance patterns with equal validity as rhythmical performances.

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

This brings us back to the questions posed at the end of the previous section:

- What effect, if any, does the relationship between these two patterns have on performance?

And

- To what extent, and in which ways, can the two patterns diverge before the verse line is ruled 'unmetrical'?

A rhythmical performance is an active, embodied response to the perceived relationship between the converging and diverging patterns of the Neutral Line and the Natural Line. A performance that fails to respond to this relationship is not a rhythmical performance at all. Verse rhythm is something that a performer *does* and it does not exist without the active engagement of such a performer. Rhythm is not, therefore, something that a verse text 'has'. Rather, we should discuss a verse text as having rhythmic potential or as presenting a certain set of rhythmical affordances. The idea of an "affordance"<sup>442</sup> stems from a theory of perception put forward by James J. Gibson and can be thought of as a perceivable opportunity for action or, more simply, as something you could do with something. The term continues to have currency in contemporary theories of enactive perception<sup>443</sup>, and has been influential in the field of product design<sup>444</sup>. A tennis ball affords actions such a throwing, rolling, bouncing and so on. The notion of perceptual affordances

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<sup>442</sup> James Jerome Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillside, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, 1986), 127.

<sup>443</sup> Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>444</sup> Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 9–12.

suggests that it is in perceiving these opportunities for action that we perceive the ball as being a ball. As the philosopher and cognitive scientist Alva Noë puts it, “when we perceive, we perceive in an idiom of possibilities for *movement*”<sup>445</sup> (my italics). If we apply these principles to metrical verse, it is in perceiving the opportunities for rhythmical performance that we perceive the verse as being verse. Put another way, our perceptions of verse as verse depend on our ability to make it move.

By examining verse construction in terms of its rhythmical affordances, I distance myself from approaches in which verse constructions are discussed in terms of their ‘meanings’. The notion of verse constructions as ‘stage directions’ relies on the implicit assumption that verse structure is a sign-system, communicating the intentions of the author to the actor: ‘verse feature X means make performance choice Y’. If verse construction presents perceptual affordances then there is no need to regard it as a sign-system at all. The relationship between the signifier and the signified may be arbitrary; the relationship between the perceptual object and the affordance is not. That a certain rhythmical performance is an affordance of a particular verse construction is no more a matter of arbitrary convention than the fact that hammering is an affordance of a hammer. So, whilst it is plausible that an author might intend to create a verse line that presents certain affordances, there is no need to ‘know’ or appeal to the intentions of the author in order to assess the affordances of a verse line.

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<sup>445</sup> Noë, *Action in Perception*, 105.

In answer to the second question: Tsur's theory of rhythmical performance rests on the notion that "the utmost limit of rhythmicality is the reader's ability or willingness to perform the verse line rhythmically"<sup>446</sup>. Tsur describes this combination of 'ability' and 'willingness' as the "rhythmic competence"<sup>447</sup> of the reader. It involves "three kinds of competences, each later one relying on the preceding one: the competence to identify the conflicts between stress pattern and metre; the competence to find a solution to the conflict, and the proper command of voice to carry out the solution"<sup>448</sup>. It is the notion of rhythmic competence that allows Tsur to declare that, "the Perception-Oriented Theory of Metre is a minor Copernican revolution, shifting the centre of the prosodic universe from the 'metricalness' of the verse line to the reader's ability or willingness to perform the line rhythmically"<sup>449</sup>. This assertion is a challenge to the core principles of generative metrics.

Generative metrics takes its inspiration from theories of generative grammar and linguistics established by Noam Chomsky<sup>450</sup>. The basic premise is that all metrical versification is governed by a strict system of linguistic rules – a kind of metric grammar. The task of the metrical theorist is to discover these rules and to articulate them as a complete set of generative formulae, thus accounting for every 'metrical' verse line ever written, every 'metrical' verse line that ever could be written, and labelling 'unmetrical' constructions which do not adhere to the generative rules of the system. As Tsur puts it, "They earnestly believe that it is

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<sup>446</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 7.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>450</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (New York: Mouton, 1957).

possible and desirable to devise such a set of rules, and it is only a matter of time and the researchers' ingenuity until this set of rules will be discovered. It exists, it lies there undiscovered, waiting for its Columbus."<sup>451</sup> Since the first theory of generative metrics was put forward by Halle and Keyser, this approach has proved widely influential, spawning numerous alternative theories and systems of rules. Some of the most celebrated early examples are those of Paul Kiparsky<sup>452</sup> and of Karl Magnuson and Frank Ryder<sup>453</sup>. Contemporary exponents include Nigel Fabb<sup>454</sup> (sometimes with Morris Halle<sup>455</sup>) and Kristin Hanson<sup>456</sup>, and Peter Groves carries many of the key principles of generative metrics through into his own 'post-generative' analysis of metrical form<sup>457</sup>.

For Tsur, the main problems with theories of generative metrics are, firstly, that they have tended to ignore the role that performance has to play in the creation and appreciation of metre and verse rhythm and, secondly, that the rules they devise seem to denounce as 'unmetrical' verse constructions that have been used 'successfully' by great poets. An example of such a rule is Halle and Keyser's assertion that "stress maxima may not correspond to W positions"<sup>458</sup>. A stress maximum is a stressed syllable positioned between two unstressed syllables. In

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<sup>451</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 19.

<sup>452</sup> Paul Kiparsky, 'Metrical Structure Assignment Is Cyclic', *Linguistic Inquiry* 10, no. 3 (1979): 421–41.

<sup>453</sup> Karl Magnuson and Frank G. Ryder, 'Second Thoughts on English Prosody', *College English* 33, no. 2 (1971): 198–216.

<sup>454</sup> Nigel Fabb, *Language and Literary Structure: The Linguistic Analysis of Form in Verse and Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>455</sup> Nigel Fabb and Morris Halle, *Meter in Poetry: A New Theory*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>456</sup> Kristin Hanson, 'Generative Metrics: The State of the Art' in Christoph Küper, ed., *Current Trends in Metrical Analysis*, (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2011), 45–62.

<sup>457</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*.

<sup>458</sup> Halle and Keyser, *English Stress*, 169.

*Poetic Rhythm*<sup>459</sup>, Tsur sets about disproving Halle and Keyser's claim. One of Tsur's examples of a construction that breaks their generative 'rule' is Milton's:

w----S w---S w—S w---S w---S (Neutral Line)

Burnt after them to the **bottomless pit** (Paradise Lost, Book VI, Line 866)<sup>460</sup>

The first syllable of "bottomless" is a stress maximum, occupying the 7th ('weak') metrical position. Tsur provides over fifty other examples of such constructions including lines by Shakespeare, Keats, Donne and Shelley<sup>461</sup>, and argues that, along with the fact that notable poets seem to have ignored the generative rule, any reader with an appropriate level of rhythmic competence can find a suitable perceptual solution to the perceptual problem presented by the line. Tsur suggests that readers might treat the 'irregular' portion of the construction as a rhythmical figure, making a 'stress valley' of the syllables occupying the 7th to the 10th metrical positions. He then demonstrates, using recordings by performers such as John Gielgud and members of the Marlowe Society<sup>462</sup>, that, when faced with such perceptual problems, competent readers employ just the sort of rhythmical devices predicted by his model. What Halle and Keyser's 'rule' seems to identify is the fact that a 'stress maximum in a weak position' is unusual, not 'unmetrical'.

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<sup>459</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 189–216.

<sup>460</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 449–52.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

One of the main attractions of generative metrics, however, is that it introduces to metrical analysis a degree of rigour and ‘objectivity’ which is perceived as lacking in traditional approaches. Nevertheless, ‘humanist’ approaches – systems that talk of ‘substitutions’ of iambs, trochees, dactyls, etc. – continue to be popular. The usual explanation offered is that “for all its real and significant limitations... it is the nearest thing there is to a common language for metrical analysis”<sup>463</sup>. The counterargument is that, despite its common currency, “the problem with traditional metrics is that, in short, it doesn’t make sense”<sup>464</sup>. In discussing one foot being ‘substituted’ for another in a line of verse, the humanist scholar assumes that certain types of feet are ‘equivalent’ to one another, but without any system for discerning which kinds of feet are ‘equivalent’ or why<sup>465</sup>. Moreover, such a discussion fails to maintain a distinction between what I have called the Neutral Line and the Natural Line. Metre is treated as though made up of syllables and language as though it consisted of ‘feet’.

In response to the “vagueness and subjectivity”<sup>466</sup> that Groves perceives in traditional metrics, generativists have tried to transform metrical analysis from an ‘art’ into a ‘science’ – an objective with which a cognitivist such as Tsur might have sympathy. Indeed, he admires a great deal about generative metrics, but, in disproving the ‘stress maximum rule’, Tsur seeks not only to discredit that particular formulation, but also to demonstrate that the generativist notion of what makes metre ‘metrical’ is based on a false premise. If the centre of the ‘prosodic universe’ is the rhythmic competence of the reader/performer, then no rules of

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<sup>463</sup> Hurley and O’Neill, *Poetic Form*, 26.

<sup>464</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 32.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

linguistic analysis or 'metric grammar' can be used to declare a verse line 'unmetrical' in principle. When we call a line 'unmetrical' all we can mean is that:

- a. It is beyond the rhythmic competence of this reader/performer to produce a rhythmical performance of this particular construction.
- b. It is beyond the utmost limits of embodied human cognition to produce a rhythmical performance of this particular construction.
- c. This particular construction is being considered within a particular cultural framework (e.g. within the context of works attributed to a particular author, artistic movement or period). When we say 'unmetrical' we do not mean that the line is 'unmetrical in principle' but rather that such a construction seems to 'go against the grain' of prevailing trends, conventions and 'tastes'.

Claims of all three kinds can be both valid and valuable, but if there is to be a coherent discussion of what metre and verse rhythm are and how they actually work, it is essential that the limitations of such claims be acknowledged. Tsur's perception-oriented theory of metre, then, restricts what we can say about metre and rhythmicality without reference to the reader/performer. At the same time, it sheds new light on what we can say about metre and rhythmicality with reference to the reader/performer. We can say that a particular reading or performance is 'rhythmical' or 'unrhythmical'. What we mean by 'unrhythmical' is that the reading or performance fails to adhere to the constitutive rules of rhythmical performance. On that basis, we can also say that rhythmical performance is a game.



## Verse Play

The prelusory goal of rhythmical performance is 'to say the words of a particular text out loud'. This rather mundane objective is transformed into a game with the introduction of constitutive rules: the performance must maintain the perceptual gestalt of the verse line and allow both the Neutral Line and Natural Line patterns to be 'simultaneously accessible to awareness'. These rules are accepted 'just because' they make the activity of rhythmical performance possible. A 'successful' rhythmical performance depends on the rhythmic competence of the performer, which is described as his or her 'willingness' and 'ability' to perform the line rhythmically. Within the game-structure the player's 'willingness' to play the game is the adoption of a lusory attitude and the player's 'ability' to play the game is what I have described as the player's lusory capacity.

The constitutive rules of rhythmical performance allow the player to operate successfully within, and to exploit, the natural laws of embodied human cognition; just as the constitutive rules of golf allow the player to operate successfully within, and to exploit, the natural laws of physics. In addition to the constitutive rules of the game and the natural laws within which the game must operate, we may encounter and devise rules of skill: useful 'hints and tips' about possible ways in which a text might be approached and in which particular verse constructions might be turned into rhythmical performances. Such rules of skill are non-compulsory and can have no claim to 'absolute truth'. There may be multiple ways

of achieving the same successful performance and the same verse construction might afford multiple performances with equal claims to being successful<sup>467</sup>.

This understanding allows us to re-categorise many of the ‘prescriptions’ and ‘authoritative readings’ offered by theatre practitioners, editors and literary critics as describing rules of skill. By understanding their readings in this way, we are able to benefit from and make use of the insights and recommendations offered by such commentators, without taking any particular interpretation or reading to be ‘correct’, or placing unnecessary restrictions on the creative freedom of the actor and the playwright.

Establishing the game-structure of rhythmical performance also allows it to be ‘nested’ within the larger game of Verse Psychology: we can refer to a particular performance choice made by an actor as fulfilling (or not) the constitutive rule of perceivability. In order for a performance choice to be perceivable, it must adhere to the constitutive rules of rhythmical performance. Put otherwise, it must be possible to demonstrate that the rhythm ascribed to the line is an affordance of the verse construction in question. Thus we may say that, for a player of the Verse Psychology Game, a successful performance choice must fulfil the criteria of being plausible, perceivable and playable.

In order to demonstrate what the rule of perceivability might mean in practice, and how it might fit with other aspects of the acting and writing process, we must be

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<sup>467</sup> Within this context, a ‘successful’ performance choice is one that achieves the prelusory goal of the game without breaking its constitutive rules.

able to provide an account of the experiential nature of rhythmical performance. To talk about the limited channel capacity of the working memory and the need to maintain perceptual gestalts does not tell us what it is like to give a rhythmical performance or what it is like to fail. Just as importantly, it does not yet provide a clear, coherent link between giving a rhythmical performance and playing a dramatic action.

### 3.3 Movements of the Psyche

One might be tempted to group Tsur's theory of rhythmical performance with notions of metrical 'counterpointing'. Counterpoint is a musical term referring to the perceived relationship and combined effect of harmonic yet independent musical lines and was coined as a term for describing verse rhythm by Gerard Manley Hopkins<sup>468</sup>. At first blush, one might think such a description could sit nicely within Tsur's discussion of rhythmical performance. I argue that the term counterpoint is, on closer analysis, unhelpful and misleading. What it suggests is that we hear two patterns being performed at the same time but remaining in some way independent of one another. When it comes to musical counterpoint, we could, in theory, 'mute' one of the two musical lines in a performance and continue to hear the other. This is not true of the vocal delivery of a verse line, at least not in any literal sense.

The notion of hearing two patterns is an attempt to find a conceptual metaphor to describe the poorly-delineated conceptual domain of experienced verse rhythm in

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<sup>468</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *'God's Grandeur' and Other Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), viii.

which two patterns are perceived as being ‘simultaneously accessible to awareness’. ‘Counterpointers’ therefore talk of hearing an “inner metronome”<sup>469</sup> or a “stress-clock ticking away iambically in the minds of sensitive readers”<sup>470</sup> – notions gently mocked by Peter Groves<sup>471</sup>. Tsur does not use the term ‘counterpoint’ himself, but he does have recourse to similar ideas: when there is strong divergence from the Neutral Line pattern, for example, Tsur suggests that, “the reader may *echo*, so to speak, in his short-term memory, the regularly alternating underlying beats”<sup>472</sup> (original emphasis). The ‘so to speak’ is perhaps the most telling part of the phrase and might be taken as an acknowledgement of the fact that the description does not match the embodied experience fully. Derek Attridge has confessed his “inability to achieve this feat of double hearing”<sup>473</sup> and George T. Wright, in dismissing the possibility of ‘counterpoint’, scoffs at the notion “that these two forces, the rhythm and the meter, remain quite separate and that what we enjoy is the abstract difference between them”<sup>474</sup>. He insists that “in fact, we hear, not two lines, but one – one actual rhythmic line”<sup>475</sup>. Even so, the difficulty of finding an appropriate description for or conceptualisation of metrical experience is highlighted by the fact that, following his stern rebuttal of the ‘counterpointing’ argument, he declares that “the belief on which this book rests is that there are always at least two structural orders simultaneously audible in iambic pentameter – the metrical and the phrasal”<sup>476</sup>. My own position is that the ‘counterpoint’ metaphor does not capture the embodied experience of the ways in which the

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<sup>469</sup> Clive Staples Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 283.

<sup>470</sup> Edmund L. Epstein and Terence Hawkes, *Linguistics and English Prosody* (Department of Anthropology and Linguistics, University of Buffalo, 1959), 47.

<sup>471</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 37.

<sup>472</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 9.

<sup>473</sup> Attridge, *Moving Words*, 10.

<sup>474</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 11.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Neutral and Natural Line patterns are made ‘simultaneously accessible to awareness’, nor do justice to the fact that a rhythmical performance is a pattern in its own right, born of the interaction of two patterns but not reducible to them.

An alternative to the notion of ‘hearing’ two patterns is to discuss the experience of verse rhythm in terms of ‘expectations’ that are fulfilled or frustrated. Tsur joins in with this conception, describing a reader’s knowledge of the Neutral Line pattern as a “metrical set”<sup>477</sup> – a term typically understood as “a ‘set’ of expectations confirmed or denied”<sup>478</sup> – and as a “perceptual hypothesis”. Wright too tells us that “variant lines depart not from a form we hear but from a form we *expect* to hear”<sup>479</sup> (original emphasis). There is no doubt, particularly given Tsur’s account of the cognitive principles underpinning verse rhythm, that the experiences of reading, speaking and hearing metrical verse involve complex processes of memory and expectation. However, I find it difficult to accept that a description framed in terms of ‘expectations confirmed or denied’ can be used to capture the embodied experiences of rhythmical performance.

Firstly, the notion of ‘expectations’ leads us once more into a realm of ‘disembodied’ mental activity. The Neutral Line pattern is cast as an ‘abstract’ metrical “grid”<sup>480</sup> – or a mysterious metrical ‘idea’ floating around in a world of disembodied Platonic forms<sup>481</sup> – against which the actual experience of the line can be measured as an always-inferior ‘realisation’. In this conception, the Neutral

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<sup>477</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 49.

<sup>478</sup> Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, 59.

<sup>479</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 11.

<sup>480</sup> Fabb, *Language and Literary Structure*, 33.

<sup>481</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 35.

Line is entirely passive, sitting quietly and abstractly at the back of the reader's mind, watching the words go by. Secondly, this notion of 'thwarted expectations' as the source of metrical experience seems to suggest that the main weapon in verse rhythm's arsenal is the element of surprise. A divergence between the Neutral Line and Natural Line patterns may well thwart our expectations of how the verse line should unfold, and listening to verse being performed, the 'surprise' of the divergence may well be a major source of rhythmical excitement. However, from a performer's perspective, thwarted expectations might be a reason for failing to give a rhythmical performance at the first attempt. Divergent patterns might take several rehearsals to transform into a successful performance choice. In such cases, it is precisely once the divergence has been assimilated into our expectations that the rhythmical performance is achieved. Moreover, the rhythmical experience is not necessarily diminished by repetition, which the notion of thwarted expectations seems to suggest it should be.

A third understanding – almost ubiquitous but rarely, it seems, applied systematically – is that the relationship between the Neutral and Natural Line patterns is experienced in terms of physical movement. Tsur dips into this conceptual metaphor, declaring that, if a reader succeeds in a rhythmical performance, "increased tension is perceived: if not – the verse line disintegrates and tension ceases"<sup>482</sup>. Attridge, too, emphasises the "physical nature of rhythm" in poetry; Groves describes the experiences of performing certain verse constructions in terms of "jolts"<sup>483</sup> and "drags"<sup>484</sup>; Wright insists that in order to

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<sup>482</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 12.

<sup>483</sup> Groves, *Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare*, 84.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

appreciate the interplay of two patterns we “must feel the tension in their divergence”<sup>485</sup>. All talk of ‘tension’ in metrical verse, all references to “mental tugging”<sup>486</sup> and to the interaction of “two forces”<sup>487</sup>, are based on our understanding and experience of the primary conceptual metaphor ‘rhythm is movement’. My contention is that the systematic application of this metaphorical concept to the creation and interpretation of metrical verse (using Laban’s systematic language of Motion Factors and Working Actions) will produce precisely the kinds of rhythmical performances anticipated by Tsur’s cognitive model and align those performances with the notion of dramatic hyperactivity.

According to the constitutive rules of rhythmical performance, a ‘successful’ reading of a line involves both the Neutral Line and Natural Line patterns being ‘simultaneously accessible to awareness’. When this stipulation is framed in terms of hearing two patterns ‘going on at the same time’, it becomes difficult to square this conception with the experiences of readers. When the issue is reframed in terms of sensations of movement these difficulties disappear. The very notion of ‘tension’ presupposes that two (or more) physical forces are ‘simultaneously accessible to awareness’. Moreover, there is no contradiction in suggesting that both forces are experienced or ‘felt’ within a single movement. If we conceptualise the two patterns as physical forces or ‘energies’, then, in experiencing the tension between them, we ensure that both forces are, by definition, ‘simultaneously accessible to awareness’.

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<sup>485</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 16.

<sup>486</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 37.

<sup>487</sup> Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, 61.

The second constitutive rule of rhythmical performance is that the perceptual gestalt of the verse line must be maintained. Once we begin to think in terms of physical movement, these two rules amount to one and the same thing: the ‘shape’, ‘force’ or ‘movement pattern’ of the Natural Line must remain in ‘tension’ with the ‘shape’, ‘force’ or ‘movement pattern’ of the Neutral Line. In maintaining and managing this tension, the performer creates a third pattern of movement: the rhythmical performance. The simple (‘neutral’) internal structure of the verse line gestalt is the Neutral Line pattern itself. The gestalt notion of “perceptual forces”<sup>488</sup> (already invoking a physical metaphor) suggests that this pattern will be experienced as ‘resisting’ division and deviation from the internal structure. The gestalt is perceived as a unified perceptual object. However, as the internal structure of the performed gestalt has a temporal dimension, it must also be perceived as a sequence of events (subunits) ‘moving’ through time. It is equally valid, therefore, to conceptualise the gestalt as having a spatial dimension: a ‘stream of energy’ or ‘force’ flowing from Point A (the beginning of the verse line) to Point B (the end of the verse line). The Natural Line pattern can be conceptualised as a ‘force’ in its own right. Left to its own devices it would follow its own course from Point X to Point Y (which may or may not coincide with the Neutral Line’s Points A and B). In a rhythmical performance, both forces are experienced as operating on and within the vocalisation (or, in the case of a silent reading, on and within the ‘imagined vocalisation’) of the performer. The resultant pattern of movement is experienced in both the rhythmical flow of speech sounds (the ‘action’) and in the psychophysical energy expended in creating that rhythmical flow of speech sounds (the ‘effort’).

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<sup>488</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 13.



The easiest way for the performer to maintain the gestalt of the verse line is to conceptualise the Natural Line as 'yielding' to the Neutral Line as much as possible; that is, to adopt a 'convergent delivery style'. This means allowing the Neutral Line to shape the Natural Line into its own image. The more convergent the two patterns are, the easier it will be to adopt this style, although, given that complete convergence is an impossibility, this process of shaping or 'tilting' will still generate a certain level of tension. The more the Natural Line diverges from and 'contends with' the Neutral Pattern, the greater the need for the performer to find ways of managing the tension. If the patterns become too divergent then the tension may 'snap' and, if it is not re-established, then the gestalt of the verse line will be lost.

Under certain circumstances, however, a momentary 'snap' followed by swift 'reengagement' may be a good way of managing the tension. Think of the action of a weightlifter performing a 'clean and jerk': the barbell is lifted to shoulder height and then, rather than pressing the weight upwards as one sustained movement, the weightlifter 'jerks' the barbell upwards and uses the moment of release to leap into position, ready to reengage with the weight of the barbell with arms stretched overhead. The moments at which the weight is propelled upwards and reengaged with are both strongly 'articulated', creating a clearly defined 'subunit' within the larger movement sequence of raising the barbell from the floor to an overhead position. That is to say, such a movement operates in an equivalent way to what Tsur describes as a 'rhythmical figure' and the reasons for resorting to such a divergent technique can be conceptualised in the same terms. Such a figure

operates as an irregular subunit within the gestalt of the verse line and can be employed to achieve relative simplicity when the 'linguistic givens' of the Natural Line refuse to give way to the internal structure of the Neutral Line. An example of a reading that 'snaps' the metrical tension can be seen in the 'stress valley' Tsur identifies in Milton's line:

Burnt after them to the **[bottomless pit]**

A performer adopting a convergent delivery style might only resort to such a device when, as in the case of a 'stress maximum in a weak position', it seems to be the only way of completing a line without losing the perception of the gestalt. A performer tending towards a more divergent delivery style might be inclined to seek out opportunities for such techniques to be employed, even when more convergent choices are afforded. In making choices for managing and maintaining the tension between the two patterns, the performer will arrive at a rhythmical performance that can be understood and experienced as a movement or sequence of movements. This paves the way for the Motion in Poetry to be used to full effect, with the movement of the line understood and experienced as a purposeful physical movement – or Working Action – which can, in turn, be understood and experienced as a psychophysical dramatic activity.

### 3.4 The Mighty Line

#### To Beat or Not to Beat

The majority of metrical verse written in the English language can be divided into two broad categories: ‘accentual’ and ‘accentual-syllabic’. In the remainder of this thesis I will focus on verse that falls into the latter of these two categories, and on one ‘accentual-syllabic’ form in particular: iambic pentameter. In discussing the task of interpreting dramatic verse for performance, the argument for focusing on this particular form might seem obvious: iambic pentameter is the dominant verse form found in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Therefore, theatre practitioners working in the English language are far more likely to be dealing with iambic pentameter than with any other metrical form. From a dramatist’s perspective, the decision to focus on iambic pentameter might seem ‘obvious’ in a less positive sense. Eliot believed that for verse drama to have any future as a credible medium for creating new work, playwrights would have to abandon, once and for all, the familiar rhythms of English ‘blank verse’<sup>489</sup>. My own view differs from that of Eliot. In order to make the argument in favour of iambic pentameter, it is first necessary to distinguish between the two broad categories mentioned above and to explain my reasons for favouring one over the other.

“Verse that holds to a *fixed number of accents in each line*, but does not fix the position of the accents or the number of unaccented syllables is called

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<sup>489</sup> Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 77.

ACCENTUAL verse<sup>490</sup> (original emphasis). Old English verse such as that of *Beowulf* is composed in ‘accentual’ metre, often with strong alliteration employed to reinforce the presence of the beats. Nursery rhymes and football chants are familiar examples of accentual forms:

[B]      [B]      [B]      [B]  
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall  
[B]      [B]      [B]      [B]  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall

Within his poem *Ash Wednesday*<sup>491</sup>, Eliot uses a two beat accentual metre:

[B]      [B]  
Lady of silences  
[B]      [B]  
Cold and distressed

As these verse forms are determined by a single metrical feature – the number of accents or ‘beats’ in the line – they are sometimes referred to as “simple”<sup>492</sup> metres.<sup>493</sup>

In contrast, ‘accentual-syllabic’ verse forms such as iambic pentameter are ‘complex’ because they are determined, not by one organisational principle, but by

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<sup>490</sup> Beum and Shapiro, *The Prosody Handbook*, 53.

<sup>491</sup> Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, 87–100.

<sup>492</sup> Groves, *Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare*, 185.

<sup>493</sup> This should not be taken to imply that all verse composed in such metres is ‘simplistic’, merely that the metre operates on the basis of a ‘simple’ prosodic principle.

three: the number of strong metrical positions, the number of metrical positions in the line overall, and the positioning of strong metrical positions within the line.

Iambic pentameter has five strong metrical positions, ten metrical positions overall, with every second position in the line being strong. It is the combination of these three organisational principles that creates the internal structure of the Neutral Line:

w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S

Thus we find 'typical' lines of iambic pentameter (that is, lines displaying high levels of convergence<sup>494</sup>) such as Shakespeare's:

Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow

(Sonnet 106, 6)

and Tennyson's:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall

('Tithonus', 1)<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> It should be noted that even these 'typical' lines do not present complete convergence between the Neutral and Natural Line patterns. The foot boundaries in Shakespeare's line are arguably 'over-articulated' and Tennyson's line has a 'caesura' at the fourth position (see Section 4.3).

<sup>495</sup> Lord Alfred Tennyson, *Tennyson: Poems* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 91.

Trochaic tetrameter, to take a different example, has four strong metrical positions, eight metrical positions overall, with every odd-numbered position being strong:

S-w   S-w   S-w   S-w

Thus we get lines such as:

Double, double toil and trouble (Macbeth, 4.1.10)

and:

Odours, when sweet violets sicken

(Shelley, 'Music, when soft voices die', 3)<sup>496</sup>

It is this 'three-dimensional' internal structure that generates a 'fixed' Neutral Line pattern and allows such metres to be subdivided and described using the terminology of metrical feet: Five subunits (feet) in which each subunit is organised into a weak-strong (iambic) pattern is called iambic pentameter; four feet with a weak-weak-strong pattern is an anapaestic tetrameter; three feet with a strong-weak pattern is a trochaic trimeter, etc. The subdivision into metrical feet adds yet further dimensions to the internal structure of the line: the size, number and shape of the subunits.

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<sup>496</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Selected Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 77.

The multidimensional ‘complexity’ of the ‘fixed’ metrical form is what allows a ‘complex’ relationship between the Neutral Line and the Natural Line to exist whilst still maintaining the gestalt of the verse line. The Natural Line can diverge from the Neutral Line pattern in numerous ways and in various combinations within a single line – the number of syllables can diverge from the number of metrical positions, the number of strong speech stresses can diverge from the number of strong metrical positions, the positioning of the strong speech stresses can diverge from the positioning of the strong metrical positions, the size, number and shape of phrasal subunits can diverge from the size, number and shape of the metrical units – and yet, through ‘tension’, retain a strong enough relationship to the Neutral Line for the gestalt to be maintained. This is because:

- a. The ‘fixed’ pattern allows the reader to register all divergences as divergences and, therefore, as sources of metrical ‘tension’.
- b. The multiple ‘points of contact’ between the two patterns means that the same Natural Line can diverge from certain aspects of the Neutral Line structure whilst continuing to converge with others.

Without a ‘fixed’ multidimensional Neutral Line pattern, verse cannot operate on the basis of the convergence/divergence model offered by Tsur. ‘Simple’ metres do not have such a Neutral Line pattern. If we try to represent the Neutral Line of four-beat accentual verse, for example, the best we can do is this:

**B                      B                      B                      B**

Or this:

**[?]    B    [?]    B    [?]    B    [?]    B    [?]**

When it comes to examining the way in which the Natural Line relates to the Neutral Line the only question is, “does it have four beats or not?” The number of syllables matched with the question marks cannot be a matter of convergence or divergence because, quite simply, there is nothing to diverge from. If there is divergence in the number of beats then, as the number of beats is the only defining feature of the line, the line will not be perceived as being divergent but as ceasing to be four-beat accentual verse. For the verse form to be perceived, then, the regular beat-count must be maintained. If, for example, we have a line with fewer than the prescribed number of beats, a ‘silent beat’ will be enacted to regularise the rhythm of the performance:

**JAMES JAMES SAID** to his **MOTHer** <sup>497</sup>

**“MOTHer,”** he **SAID**, said **HE** **[BEAT]**

The beat might even be realised as a clap or a foot stamp. As we shall see in later sections, ‘silent beats’ can have a part to play in the performance of complex forms such as iambic pentameter, but they are not obligatory in the way that they are for the performance of accentual verses: other performance choices might be

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<sup>497</sup> Alan Alexander Milne, *When We Were Very Young* (London: Egmont UK, 2011), 30.



equally successful in maintaining the gestalt of the verse line. An accentual form, then, is a “metre specified by reinforcement not counterpoint”<sup>498</sup> in which “there is only one way to speak the line and the metre denies space to the individual voice except to join a pre-given order it cannot modify”<sup>499</sup>. This system of ‘reinforcement’, along with the ‘isochronic’ principle that speech stresses will typically occur at regular time intervals, makes accentual verse very well-suited to choral chanting, but less suited to the task of embodying “an individual voice ‘actually’ speaking”<sup>500</sup>.

It is possible to treat complex forms such as iambic pentameter as accentual metre<sup>501</sup>. Possible. Though not, one might argue, desirable. To impose an accentual ‘reinforcement’ system of performance onto a text of iambic pentameter is likely to produce a reading in which the verse is “thumped out as doggerel”<sup>502</sup>. From a game-playing perspective, one might be tempted to say that if, within a certain game-structure, such verse is treated as accentual metre then, to all intents and purposes, it is accentual metre, if only within that context. However, this is merely a case of two different games being played with the same materials and not, as some advocates of ‘accentualising’ complex metres seem to suppose, the discovery of one ‘natural’ game hidden within the ‘artificial’ construct of another<sup>503</sup>. If a football is used to play basketball – if it is treated as a basketball – then for the purposes of the game being played, it is a basketball. But this doesn’t mean that footballs are basketballs in disguise. Moreover, when it comes to iambic

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<sup>498</sup> Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, 63.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>503</sup> Joseph Malof, ‘The Native Rhythm of English Meters’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 5, no. 4 (1964): 580–94.

pentameter, there is reason to suppose that, although it can be treated as accentual metre, it is a more effective tool when treated as accentual-syllabic verse. Wright argues that critics such as Northrop Frye and Joseph Malof, in trying to show that there is an underlying accentual system governing complex metres such as iambic pentameter, “only show how peculiarly they must read the lines”<sup>504</sup>.

Perhaps the most sophisticated attempt to apply accentual ‘reinforcement’ models to complex metres is to be found in the ‘beat prosody’ of Derek Attridge<sup>505</sup>. He represents the structure of iambic pentameter as a series of beats and off-beats:

o B o B o B o B o B

This looks much more like the Neutral Line that I have presented. In acknowledging the importance to the metre of what goes on between the beats, this is undoubtedly an improvement on the accentual model offered earlier in this section. Nevertheless, Attridge’s system still relies on metrical reinforcement rather than the divergence model offered by Tsur. The ‘beat’ system ignores key aspects of the Neutral Line structure and as a result fails to account for many of the rhythmic potentialities and affordances that Tsur’s model can reveal. In short, it is a “deliberate simplification of the prosodic base... [with] the consequent disadvantage that it cannot easily register some of the more delicate distinctions in

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<sup>504</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 298.

<sup>505</sup> Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm*.

metrical practice within the tradition of heroic verse itself”<sup>506</sup>. Within a simple ‘beat’ system, the line we have seen from *Troilus and Cressida*:

Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice,

and this line from Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Churchyard*:

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day (Gray, *Elegy*, 1)<sup>507</sup>

are both considered “prototypical”<sup>508</sup> because both follow the pattern of beats and offbeats anticipated by the underlying pattern. However, the lines are not rhythmically identical, nor do they display identical sets of perceptual features. For example, the first line reinforces the foot boundaries of the Neutral Line pattern, whilst the second line violates those boundaries in the words “Curfew” and “parting”. I shall argue that, in creating a rhythmical performance, these differences must be acknowledged and responded to. My contention, then, is that complex metres are best suited to the embodiment of the dramatic actions of individual dramatic characters and that, moreover, playwrights and actors will be more likely to exploit the full hyperactive potential of complex metres by treating them as complex metres; that is, by preferring the game of rhythmical performance to that of ‘accentualisation’.

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<sup>506</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 101.

<sup>507</sup> Thomas Gray, *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray: English, Latin and Greek*, ed. Herbert W. Starr (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 37.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

## Perceptions of Pentameter

The question remains as to why, with any number of ‘accentual-syllabic’ metres to choose from, the contemporary playwright would elect to compose iambic pentameter. The fact that so many of the critics cited above frame their discussions in relation to the English ‘blank verse’ tradition is indicative of just how dominant iambic pentameter has been. However, my argument is that the reasons for iambic pentameter’s enduring popularity, and the reasons for choosing it now, go beyond a discussion of tradition and convention. There is evidence to suggest that our bias in favour of the English ‘heroic line’ is not merely cultural but cognitive. The first aspect to consider is the length of the line as a unit of perception.

In the 1980s, the poet Frederick Turner teamed up with the psychologist and neuroscientist Ernst Pöppel to examine the relationship between the temporal structures verse forms and the ways in which those structures might be perceived and processed by the human brain<sup>509</sup>. In comparing the varying line lengths of popular verse forms in different languages and cultures, they discovered that “this fundamental unit nearly always takes from two to four seconds to recite, with a strong peak in distribution between two-and-a-half and three-and-a-half seconds”<sup>510</sup>. Most lines exceeding the three-and-a-half second limit, and all lines taking over four seconds to recite will, according to these findings, contain a strong

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<sup>509</sup> Turner, *Natural Classicism*, 61–105.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

caesura, splitting the line in two. The significance of these findings lies in the fact that:

The three-second period, roughly speaking, is the length of the human present moment... to use a cybernetic metaphor, we possess an auditory information “buffer” whose capacity is three seconds’ worth of information; at the end of three seconds the “buffer” is full and it passes on its entire accumulated stock of information to the higher processing centres.<sup>511</sup>

The implication being that verse lines taking an average of two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half seconds to recite operate in harmony with a three second ‘pulse’ of mental processing. Turner links this three-second unit of perceptual experience to the philosophical notion of the ‘specious present’: “the original paragon and prototype of all conceived times... the short duration of which we are immediately and incessantly sensible”<sup>512</sup>. The findings of Turner and Pöppel reaffirm the idea put forward by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren that the verse line must operate as a “unit of attention”<sup>513</sup> and have been seized upon and approved in the twenty-first century by the evolutionary literary theorist Brian Boyd:

Poets arrange lines (or the speech units rendered as written lines) so that each comes under the undivided spotlight of our attention before we move onto the next. Or, to switch from a visual metaphor to a more appropriate auditory one...

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 88–89.

<sup>512</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 631.

<sup>513</sup> Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry* (New York: Heinle & Heinle Publishers Inc., 1976), 497.

poetry holds the mind's ear, in lines that take around three seconds to say. Poets of course had not known that they were constructing lines to fit the human auditory present or the capacity of the working memory; but that's what they have discovered, by trial and error, because that length holds human attention better, more concentratedly, than longer or bitsier units. Verse, in other words, employs language to fit a humanly universal cognitive constraint.<sup>514</sup>

Lines of iambic pentameter operate towards the upper limit of this 'Goldilocks Zone' of temporal perception, taking an average of 3.3 seconds to recite<sup>515</sup>. Iambic pentameter is a form that, within the English language, exercises the human experience of the 'auditory present' to its full capacity without overstepping its limits. As Boyd notes, however, it is not only a question of how long a line takes to say but how much information is packed into that time span.

For the verse line to operate as a 'unit of attention', its cognitive load must not exceed the capacity of the human working memory; an idea with which Tsur has made us familiar. Since the mid-twentieth century, discussions have been ongoing about the precise capacity of the working memory, how best to calculate it and how this system relates to other short and long-term memory functions<sup>516</sup> but, again, iambic pentameter seems to be a 'perfect fit'; providing an instance in

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<sup>514</sup> Boyd, *Why Lyrics Last*, 17.

<sup>515</sup> Turner, *Natural Classicism*, 76.

<sup>516</sup> e.g. George A. Miller, 'The Magical Number Seven, plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information', *Psychological Review* 63, no. 2 (1956): 81–97; Alan D. Baddeley and Graham Hitch, *Psychology of Learning and Motivation*: (New York: Academic Press, 1975); Anders Ericsson and Walter Kintsch, 'Long-Term Working Memory', *Psychological Review* 102, no. 2 (1995): 211–45; Patrick Colm Hogan, *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nelson Cowan, *Working Memory Capacity* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

which, “the printed line rightly defines the recurring nonsyntactic unit”<sup>517</sup> available to the working memory. This supports Tsur’s conclusion that “the longest verse line that can be perceived as a rhythmic unit without an obligatory break is ten-syllable-long”<sup>518</sup>. Thus lines longer than iambic pentameter seem to have “only a provisional reality”<sup>519</sup>. Exceeding the capacity of the working memory and the limits of the auditory present, “longer lines tend to receive from the reader or hearer an unconscious restructuring”<sup>520</sup>. The obligatory break in such a line means that, however it might be set out on the page, in performance it is perceived, not as a single line, but as two smaller perceptual units. Shorter lines – assuming that they are not so short as to be subsumed into a larger perceptual unit – can operate as ‘units of attention’ but, along with leaving less space for rhythmic variation, neither fill the ‘metrical moment’ nor exercise the working memory to its full capacity. One might say that shorter verse lines do not ‘demand our full attention’. It is perhaps for this reason that shorter verse lines tend to be associated with “light subjects”<sup>521</sup> and “levity”<sup>522</sup> whilst longer lines such as iambic pentameter have tended to be preferred “for epic or tragic matters”<sup>523</sup>.

Another major factor in iambic pentameter’s ability to operate as an unbroken ‘unit of attention’ is that it “resists the temptation to divide in half. In fact, it *cannot* do so”<sup>524</sup> (original emphasis). This point has been taken up by Tsur: “there is no single

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<sup>517</sup> Hogan, *The Mind and Its Stories*, 40.

<sup>518</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 9.

<sup>519</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 5.

<sup>520</sup> Alex Preminger, Frank J. Warnke, and O. B. Hardison Jr, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 450.

<sup>521</sup> Turner, *Natural Classicism*, 77.

<sup>522</sup> Preminger, Warnke, and Hardison Jr, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 450.

<sup>523</sup> Turner, *Natural Classicism*, 77.

<sup>524</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 5.

point in the iambic pentameter line which would divide it into two equal halves”<sup>525</sup>.

Gestalt principles suggest that psychological organisation will always be as ‘good’ or ‘simple’<sup>526</sup> as the prevailing conditions will allow. In general, a gestalt will be ‘simpler’ if it is organised into the smallest possible number of subunits, with two being the smallest number into which a whole might be divided. The Neutral Line of iambic pentameter, however, refuses to be divided into two without the creation of irregular subunits. The ten metrical positions could be divided into two units of five, but this results in an asymmetrical distribution of strong and weak positions:

w-S-w-S-w                      S-w-S-w-S

The pattern cannot be divided into three or four equal subunits either. The smallest possible number of regular subunits is five:

w-S    w-S    w-S    w-S    w-S

This has a number of important connotations. It means that the internal structure of the Neutral Line is not merely convenient, it is perceptually inevitable. The impossibility of the pattern dividing into two equal halves means that iambic pentameter has “considerably greater integrity than either iambic tetrameter or the iambic hexameter”<sup>527</sup> or any other line that can be split down the middle. Unless

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<sup>525</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 116.

<sup>526</sup> ‘Simple’ here refers to the gestalt structure of the Neutral Line pattern, not to the *nature* of the metric form. In other words, it would be wrong to assume that the organisation of the Neutral Line would be ‘simpler’ if treated as a ‘simple’ rather than a ‘complex’ metre.

<sup>527</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 115.



there is outside interference, the line will not divide into equal hemistichs (half lines) that are able to take on a ‘perceptual independence’ of their own. When there is outside interference – that is, when the Natural Line pattern introduces a caesura – there is no ‘safe’, convergent position at which to divide the line<sup>528</sup>. In other words, all caesurae within iambic pentameter can be regarded as divergences and, therefore, as potential sources of tension.

The perceptual inevitability of foot divisions within the Neutral Line pattern also help to explain the common experience – frustrating, perhaps, to scholars wishing to distance themselves from the “foot fetishism”<sup>529</sup> of traditional metrics – that “the notion of the foot... seems to have a degree of validity in heroic verse, at least at some level of abstraction.”<sup>530</sup> Halle and Keyser denied the existence of the foot as a meaningful unit in English-language versification<sup>531</sup>, and given the problems of humanist foot-substitution theory<sup>532</sup>, a number of critics have been keen to follow suit. Even the devout foot-prosodist George T. Wright has felt the need to qualify the articles of his faith: “graphic foot dividers are an analytical convenience and do not cut into the sound of phrases in some artificial way”<sup>533</sup>. Wright’s choice of words – ‘in some artificial way’ – along with Groves’ rather evasive, ‘at least at some level of abstraction’, leave considerable room for debate. Do foot divisions affect phrasing in ‘some non-artificial way’? At what ‘level of abstraction’ do metrical feet become abstract enough to leave the phrasing to its own ‘concrete’

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<sup>528</sup> The *least* disruptive position for a caesura within a line of iambic pentameter is after the fourth metrical position. The reasons for this are explored in the next chapter. See section 4.3.

<sup>529</sup> Alan Holder, *Rethinking Meter: A New Approach to the Verse Line* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1995), 29.

<sup>530</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 33.

<sup>531</sup> Halle and Keyser, *English Stress*, 167.

<sup>532</sup> Groves, *Strange Music*, 18–20.

<sup>533</sup> Wright, *Hearing the Measures*, 191.

devices? Attridge's spine might tingle at the presence of feet and their "ghostly divisions"<sup>534</sup> but, within the analysis of iambic pentameter, "that Napoleon of notions, the foot"<sup>535</sup> marches on and no one, it seems, has succeeded in bringing it to its final Waterloo.

The notion of 'tension' between the Neutral and Natural Line patterns in rhythmical performance, along with gestalt principles of perceptual organisation, can explain the role of foot-divisions within iambic pentameter. The feet exist as part of the Neutral Line pattern and not as part of the Natural Line pattern. The Neutral Line pattern is either developed in the minds of readers as the result of interaction with a specific text (the best explanation of the cognitive processes involved here is given, not by Tsur, but by Marina A. Krasnoperova<sup>536</sup>) or pre-exists the interaction with a specific text, as might be the case with an experienced reader of iambic pentameter picking up a copy of *Paradise Lost* for the first time. The foot divisions exist within that pattern as part of the 'simplest' internal structure that can be given to the gestalt. Thus, when Don Paterson says, "Can everyone please stop marking in the feet, and imagining caesurae where there's no punctuation to indicate a pause? I know it's fun. But they're just not there, folks,"<sup>537</sup> one suspects that he has been looking for feet in all the wrong places. No matter how hard you look, you will not discover metrical feet within the Natural Line pattern. If, however, you accept that the feet are part of a different pattern, then it becomes apparent that taking the absence of metrical feet within the Natural Line as proof of their non-existence

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<sup>534</sup> Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2014), 14.

<sup>535</sup> Holder, *Rethinking Meter*, 30.

<sup>536</sup> Marina A. Krasnoperova, 'Meter, Rhythm, and Performance in the Reconstructive Simulation of Versification' in Küper, ed., *Current Trends in Metrical Analysis*, 79–98.

<sup>537</sup> Don Paterson, *Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets: A New Commentary* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), 377.

is a bit like proving the non-existence of lemons by conducting a thorough survey of an orange grove. Foot divisions can only have a bearing on the reading of a text if the reader is actively engaged in a process of rhythmical performance: if the game-playing performer has accepted the ‘unnecessary obstacle’ of maintaining the tension between the Neutral Line and the Natural Line, then he or she will pay attention to foot divisions as part of playing the game.

Within the internal structure of both the Neutral and Natural Line patterns there exists a perceptual hierarchy governing the relative degrees of ‘importance’ or ‘prominence’ given to the various boundaries of units and subunits. As Tsur puts it, “the boundaries of units constitute a scale: the higher the rank of the unit, the greater the weight of its boundary”<sup>538</sup>. Within the Neutral Line of iambic pentameter, the highest ranked unit is the line itself, next down are the metrical feet, and at the bottom of the pile are the metrical positions. Viewed from this perspective, metrical feet are the ‘middle managers’ of the Neutral Line organisation. All else being equal, foot boundaries will be given more weight than positional boundaries but less weight than the line-ending. In a Neutral Line that can be split into two equal parts – iambic hexameter, for example – there is another rank on the scale: the hemistich or half-line.

w-S---w-S---w-S      w-S---w-S---w-S

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<sup>538</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 113.

The two hemistich structure of iambic hexameter can be seen in Shakespearean examples such as:

That troop with majesty.    Ourself by monthly course,

(King Lear, 1.1.133)

Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand, none

(Richard II, 4.1.171)

I would I knew thy heart.

‘Tis figur’d in my tongue.

(Richard III, 1.2.196)

In this hierarchy, the hemistich ‘outranks’ the foot. In terms of perception, as long as the hemistich boundaries are maintained, variations in the organisation of metrical feet will be relatively ‘unmarked’; that is, they will not attract attention. This can be demonstrated visually:

w-S---w-S---w-S    w-S---w-S---w-S

w-S-w---S---w-S    w-S---w-S-w---S

w-S---w-S-w---S    w-S-w---S-w---S

As opposed to:

w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S  
w-S-w-S   w-S-w   S-w-S  
w-S   w-S-w   S-w   S-w   S  
w-S-w   S   w-S-w-S   w-S

As the Neutral Line of iambic pentameter cannot be ‘simplified’ into a smaller number of subunits than the five metrical feet, there is no intervening rank between the foot and the line and, as a result, foot boundaries will be perceived as having more ‘weight’ (more ‘validity’) than they do in other verse forms.

The ‘best’ way to maintain the gestalt of the verse line in performance is to maintain the internal structure of the Neutral Line, which means giving an appropriate degree of ‘weight’ to the foot boundaries. However, to stick too rigidly to the Neutral Line pattern can result in the destruction of the Natural Line, with its own hierarchy of units and subunits which must be taken into account if one is to give a rhythmical performance. The metrical feet of iambic pentameter will *resist* any attempt to usurp their authority and can therefore be regarded as potential sources of tension when divergent patterns have to be accommodated into the gestalt of the verse line in performance<sup>539</sup>. However, the authority of the lower order perceptual subunits may be overruled in order to preserve the integrity of the

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<sup>539</sup> The processes of identifying such divergences and determining the ways in which they might influence rhythmical performance choices are explored in section 4.3 below.

higher order perceptual unit<sup>540</sup>. Viewed from this perspective, it is perfectly possible to maintain the idea that metrical foot divisions are an experiential feature of iambic pentameter whilst also accepting that such divisions are not always 'marked' in performance. The fact that the smallest possible number of regular subunits within the Neutral Line gives rise to such a high number of 'weighty' perceptual boundaries is, I suggest, one of the reasons for the wide variety of rhythmical affordances found within lines of iambic pentameter.

In presenting the case for iambic pentameter I have made the following observations:

- Complex verse forms provide a wider range of opportunities for rhythmical performance and are more suited to creating the voices of individual dramatic characters.
- Iambic pentameter is an ideal length and presents an ideal amount of perceptual information for it to operate as an unbroken 'unit of attention'.
- That iambic pentameter has the highest possible number of metrical positions for an unbroken perceptual unit means that, from a purely mathematical point of view, it presents a greater number of possible divergences than other metrical forms.
- The fact that the line cannot be divided into two equal halves gives iambic pentameter greater integrity than many other verse forms and makes caesura-placement a rich source of metrical tension.

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<sup>540</sup> An example of such top-down reorganisation would be the creation of a rhythmical figure such as Tsur's 'stress valley', in which four syllables/positions are 'emphatically grouped together' thereby undermining the authority of the intervening foot boundary.

- The relatively high prominence of foot divisions within iambic pentameter is another rich source of metrical tension and allows the interaction of the Neutral and Natural Line patterns to produce a wide range of rhythmical affordances.

None of this is to suggest that English-language dramatic verse couldn't or shouldn't be written using another metre, but the arguments in favour of using iambic pentameter in drama are, I believe, compelling. That being the case, the methodologies developed and demonstrated in Part Two of this thesis are designed to meet the specific challenges of composing and analysing dramatic iambic pentameter.

## Part Two: Theory in Practice

### Chapter 4: The Anatomy of Verse

#### 4.1 Basic Anatomy

This chapter outlines what I call the Anatomical Approach to metrical analysis. This approach adapts the principles of Part One into a practical methodology for identifying the metrical features and rhythmical affordances of dramatic iambic pentameter. The Anatomical Approach is not part of the structure of the Verse Psychology Game but rather my own system for playing the game. I therefore consider the development of the Anatomical Approach to be part of my creative practice.

#### Looking for Problems

Rhythmic competence relies on three interrelated sets of skills:

- The ability to identify 'perceptual problems': to register (consciously or otherwise) divergences between the Neutral Line and Natural Line patterns.
- The ability to conceive 'perceptual solutions' to such 'perceptual problems'; that is, to devise a rhythmical performance in which both patterns are made 'simultaneously accessible to awareness'.
- The ability to carry out such a rhythmical performance, which may require high levels of vocal control and dexterity.



Of these three components, I will focus on the first two. This is not because the third is less important but because I assume that the required vocal skills are those that would be expected of any professional theatre actor and that prospective players of the Verse Psychology Game will, therefore, either be in possession of these skills or will acquire them in the course of their professional training. When it comes to the playwright-as-gamewright, I suggest that the ability to vocalise a rhythmical performance enhances one's capacity to experience the rhythm and movement of the verse in a 'silent reading' and that if such skills have not yet been developed then the playwright-as-gamewright should seek to acquire them. Nevertheless, I believe that the vocal training described by practitioners such as Cicely Berry<sup>541</sup>, Barbara Houseman<sup>542</sup> and Patsy Rodenburg<sup>543</sup> is more than adequate for the task and that there is no need for me to add to the wealth of literature that exists on this topic. For the purposes of this discussion, whenever I use the term 'actor' or 'performer', I am referring not only to actors themselves but to the 'gamewright-in-training' who adopts an 'actorly approach' to the text.

The first issue, then, is that of actors identifying ('bringing to attention') the perceptual features or 'problems' of a particular verse construction. Some actors – whether as a result of 'natural sensitivity', long experience or a combination of the two – may be able to register such metrical disturbances intuitively and without the need for further instruction. It follows that to apply the system of metrical analysis presented here is a rule of skill within the game of rhythmical performance and

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<sup>541</sup> Berry, *Voice and the Actor*.

<sup>542</sup> Houseman, *Finding Your Voice*.

<sup>543</sup> Patsy Rodenburg, *The Actor Speaks: Voice and the Performer* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997).

Verse Psychology, rather than a constitutive rule of the game. A rhythmical performance is a rhythmical performance, however it might have been achieved. This first step towards producing such a performance might seem the most straightforward: it's a game of spot the difference. The Neutral Line pattern involves a certain arrangement of 'strong' and 'weak' metrical positions:

w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S

The Natural Line pattern will involve a certain arrangement of syllables, with each syllable assigned a certain level of speech stress. The patterns either match or they don't. Whilst accepting this basic premise, the methodology proposed here assumes that the process of identifying 'perceptual problems' within lines of iambic pentameter can be made easier and more systematic and that, as a result, this methodology can be used as a tool to train and develop rhythmic competence.

Taking inspiration from Laban's discussion of Motion Factors, I distil the perceptual features of iambic pentameter into four categories or 'Metrical Factors':

- Bones
- Joints
- Muscle Tone
- Muscle Tissue

By discussing verse in terms relating to the physical body I hope to reaffirm the importance of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, with the anatomical terminology serving as a constant reminder that the purpose of the metrical analysis is to enable rhythmical performances that can be understood and experienced as purposeful movements of the human body. The analysis of verse in terms of Bones, Joint, Muscle Tone and Muscle Tissue is what I call the Anatomical Approach.

**Bones:** The Neutral Line of iambic pentameter contains ten metrical positions. When there is a one-to-one correspondence between metrical positions and syllables – that is, when each metrical position is ‘occupied by’ or ‘matched with’ a single syllable – then the Natural Line pattern can be described as converging with the ‘bone structure’ of the Neutral Line. If there is no one-to-one correspondence – if, for example, the Natural Line has fewer than ten syllables – then this is identified as divergence between the patterns. In the following verse line, the Natural Line has only nine syllables and can be understood as leaving the fifth metrical position ‘unoccupied’. The divergence is marked ^. Such a construction is sometimes called a “broken-backed line”<sup>544</sup>:

w---S w----S    w----S    w—S w---S    (*Neutral Line*)

Horrible sight! – ^ Now, I see, ‘tis true    (Macbeth, 4.1.122)

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<sup>544</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 176.

**Joints:** The Neutral Line pattern has an internal structure governed by a hierarchy of perceptual units and subunits: lines, feet, metrical positions. If the Natural Line pattern is to converge with that of the Neutral Line, then each metrical boundary or 'joint' will be matched with a linguistic or phrasal boundary that is judged to be of an 'equivalent rank'. Divergences can be identified as the over- or under-articulation of metrical joints. A Neutral Line joint is over-articulated when it is matched with a Natural Line boundary of 'higher rank' and under-articulated when it is matched with a Natural Boundary of 'lower rank'. In the following line, for example, the fourth metrical joint (the second 'foot joint') is matched with a higher rank of phrasal boundary than the other 'foot joints' in the line and can thus be regarded as being over-articulated. This results in a caesura. The over-articulation is marked |.

w----S w----S w---S w---S w---S (Neutral Line)

Put out the light, | and then put out the light (Othello, 5.2.7)

**Muscle Tone:** The Neutral Line pattern involves alternating weak and strong metrical positions. The Natural Line converges with the Neutral Line when each weak position is matched with a relatively weak speech stress and each strong position is matched with a relatively strong speech stress. Given that speech stresses do not tend to operate on a binary system of strong and weak, 'complete convergence' is unlikely. That is to say, even in what might be considered a convergent line the relative levels of speech stress found in strong and weak positions are unlikely to be uniform. More 'marked' divergences occur when relatively strong speech stresses are matched with weak metrical positions and

vice versa. This can give rise to the constructions that, in humanist metrics, are described as ‘foot substitutions’. In the following line, the first weak position is matched with a relatively strong speech stress and the subsequent strong metrical position is matched with a relatively weak speech stress. This is often referred to as an initial ‘trochaic inversion’.

w----S w—S w---S w---S w----S (Neutral Line)

**GALlop** apace you fiery-footed steeds (Romeo & Juliet, 3.2.1)

**Muscle Tissue:** The Neutral Line pattern is ‘silent’ in the sense that it is a nonverbal construct and does not contain speech sounds. This means that there is no sound pattern for the Natural Line to diverge from. The speech sounds of the Natural Line, then, cannot be said to converge with or diverge from the Neutral Line pattern in and of themselves. Nevertheless, an examination of these speech sounds might inform and modify the assessment of divergences within the other three categories and might also affect an assessment of the rhythmical affordances presented by a particular construction. As an example of speech sounds modifying the assessment of another Metrical Factor, strong alliteration within a line or sequence of lines might lead us to perceive the alliterative words or syllables as having increased prominence. These speech sounds might, therefore, be assigned a higher level of stress than they would have been given if their alliterative quality had not been taken into account. This modifies the assessment of Muscle Tone in the line or lines. In Juliet’s line, quoted above, the alliterative ‘f’

sounds might be understood as inviting exceptionally high levels of speech stress<sup>545</sup>.

As an example of how speech sounds might affect the assessment of the rhythmical affordances, we can look once more at the line taken from *Othello*. The divergence that has been highlighted is the caesura following the word “light”. Tsur notes that in verse lines containing a caesura, “the line exerts pressure for completion but, at one and the same time, for segmentation too”<sup>546</sup>: the Neutral Line impels the reader to move forwards at the caesura and the Natural Line encourages the reader to pause. One way of maintaining the tension between the patterns might be to prolong the sound occupying the metrical position at which the caesura intrudes, i.e. by ‘stretching’ the word “light” the actor might be able to create the sensation of ‘stopping’ without leaving a marked pause between the fourth and fifth positions. The degree to which a particular line affords this perceptual solution (and the psychophysical sensations of movement that are produced in giving such a performance) will depend on the nature of the speech sound that occupies the metrical position. The word “light” does allow some scope for the prolongation of the vowel and for the articulation of the final consonant to be delayed. If, however, we change the first part of the line to “Put out the bin” the word now occupying the fourth metrical position is less amenable to such manipulation: we now have a short vowel sound instead of a long one. If we try to ‘stretch’ the sound, we end up with “Put out the bean”. We might therefore

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<sup>545</sup> Stress, it should be noted, is not merely a question of amplitude. A sound can also be stressed by way of inflection, pitch, duration, and by various combinations of these qualities. It follows that to say a speech sound is stressed does not mean that it must be performed loudly or overemphasised (‘hit over the head’).

<sup>546</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 110.

conclude that a rhythmical performance involving the prolongation of the speech sound preceding the caesura is not an affordance of the rewritten line.

By examining all four Metrical Factors, the Anatomical Approach allows lines of dramatic iambic pentameter to be examined in all of their complexity, and can be used to bring every instance of divergence to the attention of the reader. When it comes to the second stage of Tsur's rhythmic competence – that of finding a 'perceptual solution' to the 'perceptual problems' presented by the text – the Anatomical Approach dispenses with the need for prescriptive appeals to authority and avoids the trap of assuming that all lines sharing a particular feature need to be performed in similar ways (e.g. 'all monosyllabic lines must be performed slowly'). Each line or sequence of lines is judged on its own merits, as a unique combination of all four Metrical Factors. Once the perceptual features of a construction have been identified, the question guiding the performer is not 'what do the rules say about how to perform lines like this?' but 'how can I perform this particular construction so that the tension between the Neutral and Natural Line patterns is embodied and experienced?'

A performance must be found in which the divergences are experienced as divergences. With a perceivable performance choice identified, the actor has further questions to explore: What are the psychophysical 'sensations' of movement generated by this performance? (i.e. How can this performance be understood and experienced in terms of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor?) Can this movement be linked to a Working Action and a dramatic activity? (i.e. Is the performance choice playable?) Is it 'logical and coherent' for this dramatic

character to play this activity within these given circumstances? (i.e. Is the performance choice plausible?)

The Anatomical Approach does not present actors and playwrights with a set of readymade answers but with a set of practical questions. By asking and answering these questions one might become a 'successful' player of the Verse Psychology Game, forging an experiential link between the construction of dramatic verse and the embodiment of dramatic action.

#### 4.2 Bones

The Neutral Line has ten metrical positions:

w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S

If the Natural Line is to converge with the bone structure of the Neutral Line, we need a line of ten syllables, so that each metrical position can be occupied or matched with a single syllable. If the number of syllables is anything other than ten then we do not have a convergent line of iambic pentameter<sup>547</sup>. Further investigation is required.

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<sup>547</sup> It is important to remember that, especially when it comes to examining texts such as Shakespeare's, certain words may include 'restorable' syllables such as "ed", which is often pronounced as a final syllable in Shakespearean texts. An example is Romeo's repeated use of the word "banished" (Act III, Scene III) which, if treated as a three syllable word, converges with the bone structure of the Neutral Line, whereas a two-syllable pronunciation would produce a large number of divergences.



If there are only nine syllables in the line, for example, it follows that one of the Neutral Line's metrical positions is unoccupied. The first task is to establish which of the positions that is. Or, rather, which metrical position we might treat as being 'unoccupied' in order to produce a rhythmical performance. A simple way of investigating this is to 'beat out' the verse: to impose a convergent reading onto the line. If we 'beat out' this nine-syllable line from *Richard II*, for instance:

Stay, the king hath thrown his warder down. (Richard II, 1.3.18)

we end up with

stay-THE    king-HATH    thrown-HIS    war-DER    down ^

(^ indicates the unoccupied position)

Treating the tenth position as unoccupied does not produce a satisfactory reading: the speech stresses miss all of the syllables we would expect them to emphasise. If we assume that it is not the tenth position that is unoccupied but the first, then what we get is:

^ STAY    the-KING    hath-THROWN    his-WAR    der-DOWN

This now makes sense. There are some unresolved issues to be addressed (the fact that the word “warder” has been split down the middle, for example), but in terms of bone structure this seems to be the simplest solution available. Not every nine syllable line, however, is best treated as having an unoccupied first position. This line, also from *Richard II*, might serve as an example:

Your Grace mistakes: only to be brief

(Richard II, 3.3.10)

If we beat it out then we get this:

Your-GRACE mis-TAKES: on-LY to-BE brief ^

Treating the first position as unoccupied doesn’t help much either:

^ YOUR grace-MIS takes:-ON ly-TO be-BRIEF

There is, however, a simple solution:

Your-GRACE mis-TAKES: ^ ON ly-TO be-BRIEF

Again, there are some unresolved issues that would need to be addressed (the excessive stress on “to” for example), but in terms of the bone structure it seems useful to treat the fifth metrical position as being unoccupied.

This same process can be used to identify all divergences within the bone structure of the verse line. Some lines may have more than one unoccupied position:

Is goads, ^ thorns, ^ nettles, tails of wasps

(The Winter's Tale, 1.2.329)

^ Stay: ^ speak: ^ speak: I charge thee, speak

(Hamlet, 1.1.52)

Some lines may involve strong positions that are treated as being unoccupied:

You have not sought it? ^ How comes it then?

(Henry IV, Part I, 5.1.27)

Others may involve Natural Line patterns containing more than ten syllables. Such constructions include lines with so-called ‘feminine’ or ‘tailed’ endings. In such cases an ‘extra’ eleventh syllable is attached to the final metrical position of the line. The divergent syllable can either be thought of as being ‘contained’ within the

same metrical position as the strong syllable to which it is attached, or as ‘breaking free’ from the metrical position and existing as an ‘extrametrical’ anomaly:

w---S w—S w—S w---S w-----S (Neutral Line)

To be, or not to be, that is the ques**(tion)** (Hamlet, 3.1.56)

Tails can also occur when an ‘extra syllable’ seems to attach itself to a syllable occupying a strong metrical position within the line. Constructions such as the one below are sometimes said to contain an “epic caesura”<sup>548</sup>:

w-----S w-----S w-----S w---S w-----S (Neutral Line)

Wake Duncan with thy knock**(ing)**: I would thou couldst! (Macbeth, 2.2.73)

When ‘extra’ syllables are seen to attach themselves, not to strong positions but to weak ones, then this can be treated as “disyllabic occupancy”<sup>549</sup>; that is, as two weak stresses both occupying the same metrical position:

w-----S w-----S w---S w-----S w-S (Neutral Line)

You made **(in a)** day, my lord, whole towns to fly

(Henry VI, Part II, 2.1.160)

<sup>548</sup> Merriam-Webster Inc, *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1995), 196.

<sup>549</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 263.

Having identified divergences within the bone structure, we can turn our attention to the task of exploring the rhythmical affordances presented by such perceptual features. That is, we can begin to consider the ways in which we might incorporate such perceptual features into a rhythmical performance of the given line or lines. As we have only examined one of the four Metrical Factors we cannot yet hope to make a perceivable choice for the line as a whole, but we can begin to explore some options. With that in mind, let us return to the example of:

^ Stay, the King hath thrown his warder down.

In order to give a rhythmical performance, both the Neutral Line pattern (which demands an occupied first metrical position) and the Natural Line pattern (which refuses to provide a syllable to occupy the first metrical position) must remain 'accessible to awareness'. The actor must experience the divergence as some form of increased tension between the two patterns. If the line is spoken as prose then the performer will not feel the divergence of the unoccupied position. If the performer is too tyrannical in imposing the metric pattern – insisting that the Natural Line converges with the Neutral Line absolutely – then the result may be something very strange indeed. In fact, short of introducing a kind of stutter:

**st-AY**, the King hath thrown his warder down.

I can see no way of making the Natural Line yield completely to the 'perceptual force' of the Neutral Line. How might one make the first syllable's absence felt? I suggest that there are at least three potential solutions to this 'perceptual problem'.

The first solution is to perform the opening syllable of the Natural Line so that it feels as though it occupies both the first and second positions of the Neutral Line. This means prolonging the word "stay": doubling the length of the speech sound in order to regularise the metre, as one might replace a crotchet with a minim in music. This has the potential to make both patterns 'accessible to awareness' and is invited as a performance choice by the diphthong, which is amenable to 'stretching'. The syllabic structure of the Natural Line is preserved and yet the tension experienced in the 'stretching' of the sound embodies the 'resistance' to this syllable structure exerted by the Neutral Line. The prolongation of the speech sound lends itself to the experience of Sustained movement, and the fact that the sound being prolonged is a strong speech stress in the line means that the movement through this sound is likely to be experienced as Strong (in Laban's sense) as well. If the movement is Strong/Sustained then the Working Action might be either a Press or a Wring.

w-----S w----S w-----S w----S w----S (*Neutral Line*)

**STA--Y**, the king hath thrown his warder down

A second solution has been suggested by Peter Groves. The unoccupied metrical position might be experienced as a “silent offbeat”<sup>550</sup>: the inclusion of a pause or the equivalent of a musical rest. Given that the unoccupied position is the first of the line, simply pausing may not seem to achieve a great deal: how will the pause be felt if nothing has come before it? However, one might experience it as the Neutral Line pattern having started to move in silence and the first syllable of the Natural Line having to ‘leap on’ or ‘catch hold of’ the verse line at the last moment, in which case the experiential quality of the divergence is less to do with the pause and more to do with the act of ‘leaping’ or ‘catching hold’. To capture this in performance the utterance of the strong speech stress will need to be ‘sudden’ and ‘sharp’, appearing, as it were, ‘out of nowhere’. Groves describes the experience of performing such a line as a “jolt”<sup>551</sup>. A jolting movement is Quick/Strong/Direct: a Punching Working Action. There is, however, an important difference between “I, as the performer, am being jolted by the verse”, which is passive, and “I am using the verse to jolt someone or something else”, which is active. If my perceivable choice is also to be playable then I would be well advised to favour the latter approach.

w-----S    w---S    w-----S    w----S    w----S    (*Neutral Line*)

^ **STAY**, the king hath thrown his warder down

The third solution is the most ‘Contending’ in terms of the Natural Line’s response to the demands of the Neutral Line and therefore the most divergent in its delivery

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<sup>550</sup> Groves, *Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare*, 83.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

style. Rather than trying to ‘placate’ the Neutral Line by occupying both positions or acknowledging the unoccupied position by enacting a ‘silent offbeat’, the first syllable of the line is given an exceptionally high level of speech stress, thus drawing attention to the moment of divergence rather than making any attempt to mitigate it. This utilises the same principle as Tsur’s use of the ‘stress valley’: that ‘foregrounding’ the divergence can strengthen rather than weaken the gestalt of the line. In terms of metrical tension, the emphatic stress can be understood and experienced as momentarily overcoming the ‘resistance’ of the Neutral Line. The Natural Line ‘stamps its authority’ on the verse, making the first metrical position conspicuous by its absence. In this approach both patterns remain ‘accessible to awareness’. This once again seems to lend itself to a Punch – a Strong/Quick/Direct movement – but with a slightly different quality to the Punch produced by the enactment of a ‘silent offbeat’. Whereas the Punch described previously seems to be dominated by the Motion Factor of Time – in the sense that its Quickness, stemming from the need to ‘catch hold’ of the verse line at just the right moment, is its most noticeable feature – this Punch seems to be more grounded, more ‘weighty’ in the sense that the Natural Line seeks to impose its Strength: Weight seems to be the dominant Motion Factor.

w----S   w----S   w-----S   w---S   w----S

**STAY**, the king hath thrown his warder down

This one example of divergence within the bone structure of the line has yielded several possibilities for rhythmical performance. It may well be that there are many more ways of ‘solving’ the perceptual problem of an unoccupied first metrical



position. Other divergences in the bone structure will present different rhythmical affordances, but the questions for exploring them will remain the same: how might I perform the line so that both patterns are made 'accessible to awareness' and so that any divergence is experienced as a shift in the tension between those patterns?

In order to make choices about the performance of this line it will first be necessary to examine it in terms of the other Metrical Factors. Only then can the movement of the line as a whole be taken into account. It then becomes a question of considering the line within its dramatic context and assessing the perceivable rhythmical affordances of the line in terms of their plausibility and playability.

### 4.3 Joints

The pattern of the Neutral Line is organised on the basis of a perceptual hierarchy of units and subunits. This internal structure determines the way in which the pattern is articulated. Tsur notes that, "Articulateness in poetry involves a *double entendre*. The word refers to both the idea of 'clear, distinct' and the idea of 'jointed'"<sup>552</sup>. The two meanings are mutually dependent: we maintain the gestalt of the verse line by making it 'clear' and 'distinct' as well as by "breaking up a whole into segments"<sup>553</sup>. The points of articulation in the Neutral Line pattern I refer to as joints.

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<sup>552</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 87.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

The Neutral Line has ten joints: one marking the boundary that closes each of the ten metrical positions. Five of these joints, however, are not only positional joints but foot joints, which, as they articulate the boundary of a higher ranked subunit, will be more ‘marked’. The final foot joint is also the line joint separating the end of one verse line from the beginning of the next. The line joint has the highest rank in Neutral Line hierarchy is therefore the most ‘marked’. We have, then, three levels of joint articulation within the Neutral Line: at level one is the articulation of the positional joints, at level two is the articulation of the foot joints and at level three is the articulation of the line joint:

w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S  
w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S   w-S

Here the three levels of articulation are represented visually: positional joints are articulated by dashes, foot joints by spaces and the line joint is articulated by the very fact that the verse lines are printed as separate lines of text on the page.

For the Natural Line to converge with the Neutral Line pattern absolutely, it will also need to display three levels of articulation with the various levels of linguistic and phrasal boundaries occurring at the appropriate points in the verse line. This might mean minor syllable boundaries converging with each of the positional joints, phonological word boundaries converging with each of the foot joints and a major phrasal boundary, such as the end of a sentence or ‘thought’, converging

with the line joint. The task of examining the joint articulation of a verse line, then, entails looking at the kind of linguistic boundary that coincides with each metrical joint and calling upon one's communicative/linguistic competence to ask whether the relative 'weight' of the boundary is convergent with or divergent from the hierarchical structure of the Neutral Line. If the linguistic boundary and the metrical joint seem to be well matched then we can describe the joint as articulated. If the linguistic boundary seems to be divergent in the sense of being too 'weighty' for its position then we can describe the joint as over-articulated. If the linguistic boundary is not 'weighty' enough then the joint can be described as under-articulated. In the following line we see over-articulation at the joint of the fourth metrical position (the second foot joint):

w---S   w----S   w---S   w---S   w---S   (*Neutral Line*)

Put out the light, | and then put out the light

The phrasal boundary that coincides with the second foot joint is relatively 'weighty' and is of higher rank than those marking the other internal foot joints. The under- and over-articulation of metrical joints results in commonly observed divergences such as caesurae (the marked over-articulation of an internal joint) and enjambment (the under-articulation of the line joint).

Examples of absolute convergence are difficult to find. This is because strings of five disyllabic words, constituting a complete phrasal unit without introducing any other 'intermediate' phrasal boundaries along the way, with each of the words

having a dominant syllable as the second of the two, are rare indeed. Some examples of lines that come close to such convergence involve lists, such as this from Shakespeare's Sonnet 106:

w---S   w---S   w-S   w-S   w----S   (*Neutral Line*)

Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow   (Sonnet106, 6)

And this from *Troilus and Cressida*:

w----S   w----S   w-----S   w---S   w----S   (*Neutral Line*)

Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice   (Troilus, 1.1.53)

In both examples we seem to have three distinct levels of articulation, with each level suited to the Neutral Line joint with which it is matched. The positional joints are matched with relatively minor word boundaries, the foot joints with relatively major words boundaries and the line joints with phrasal boundaries (in each case the line joint coincides with the end of the list, if not the end of the 'thought' or sentence). In this sense the Natural Line converges with the joint structure of the Neutral Line. One might suggest, however, that although the articulation at the foot joints is uniform, these joints are all over, or at least heavily, articulated, i.e. the level of articulation at the foot joints is higher than the Neutral Line pattern demands. Such over-articulation throughout the line may itself be a threat to the

integrity of the gestalt. The feet may become so separate from one another that the performer ceases to perceive them as subunits of a unified whole. If the articulation of the Natural Line boundaries is achieved by leaving marked pauses at every comma then the verse line will take too long to be spoken to be perceived within a single 'metrical moment', i.e. the working memory will be unable to process the verse line as a single 'package' of auditory information<sup>554</sup>. Even such seemingly convergent lines, then, may be experienced as giving rise to metrical tension that will need to be maintained and managed in giving a rhythmical performance.

If the line from *Troilus and Cressida* is performed with the sense that the perceptual force of the Neutral Line impels the reader to move through the foot joints at a 'regular' pace – that is, at a pace that completes the utterance as an approximately three-second unit – whilst the perceptual force of the Natural Line puts pressure on the reader to give greater separation to the phrasal boundaries, then what might be experienced is the Natural Line 'pulling back' against the forward momentum of the Neutral Line. One way of managing this tension might be to 'stretch' the speech sounds of the strong metrical positions slightly, so that the sense of separation and 'stopping' encouraged by the Natural Line is achieved whilst no pauses are left at the foot joints, thus maintaining the forward movement of the Neutral Line. This might give rise to the sensation of a Sustained (perhaps a Pressing) movement through the line.

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<sup>554</sup> See Chapter 3, section 3.4.

Slowing down and pausing are not the only ways of increasing levels of articulation. They may well be the easiest ways of achieving increased articulation, but if we assume a high level of vocal and articulatory dexterity on the part of the player, then there is no reason to suppose that more ‘difficult’ or ‘sophisticated’ solutions cannot be executed successfully. One of Peter Hall’s injunctions is that lines made up of monosyllabic words must be performed slowly<sup>555</sup>. Hall, whilst continuing to assume that the construction is Shakespeare’s way of ‘indicating’ the correct performance choice, does offer a practical explanation as to why such a line might warrant such a performance: “if we try to speak this line quickly and trippingly, if we hurry it, it becomes incomprehensible”<sup>556</sup>. In one sense, this can be regarded as an accurate description of the ‘perceptual problem’ presented by the line. Here is a famous line of Othello’s:

w----S    w----S       w-----S    w----S    w----S                    (*Neutral Line*)

Keep up your bright swords for the dew will rust (*them*). (Othello, 1.2.59)

As we are focusing on the joint structure of the verse line we can, for now, pass over the divergence in the bone structure (the eleventh syllable of the Natural Line creating a ‘tail’) in silence. The fact that every word is monosyllabic may lead us to the idea that the line is uniformly over-articulated in the sense that every positional joint is matched with a word boundary rather than a mere syllable boundary. More noticeable is the fact that some of the positional joints – those of the first and fifth positions – are matched with major word boundaries. Major word boundaries are

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<sup>555</sup> Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players*, 35.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

relatively high-ranking in the articulatory hierarchy of the Natural Line and there is evidence to suggest that, in the flow of everyday speech, we take longer to articulate a monosyllabic word than we do to articulate the same speech sound when it appears in a polysyllabic word<sup>557</sup>. This means that, broadly speaking, people will take longer to articulate the word “broad” than to articulate the first syllable of “broadly”. Hall seems right, then, in suggesting that, when faced with a line of monosyllabic words, our first instinct is to speak more slowly than we would when uttering a string of polysyllabic words. He is also right in suggesting that if we gabble through the line quickly and fail to articulate the speech sounds clearly, then we lose any sense of the rhythm of the line: the Natural Line falls apart rather than hold its own against the forward momentum of the Neutral Line. However, actors who have undergone voice training may have spent considerable time and effort in trying to achieve high levels of difficult articulation without slowing down. Indeed, if the only way of dealing with a text that demands high levels of articulation is to slow down, then actors may feel that the hours spent reciting “a bloke’s back brake-block broke” at breakneck speed were something of a waste. As far as the Verse Psychology Game is concerned, there is no ‘rule’ to prohibit lines of monosyllables being spoken quickly. However, doing so whilst keeping both the Neutral and Natural Line patterns ‘accessible to awareness’ will give rise to a very different experience of Effort and of movement to a performance in which the Natural Line ‘pulls back’ against the forward momentum of the Neutral Line. The Quickness is likely to be accompanied by Strength, as the speaker has to ‘work very hard’ to articulate the line at pace. As ever, the rhythmic competence of the actor resides not in his or her willingness and ability to perform the line as

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<sup>557</sup> James E. Copeland, *New Directions in Linguistics and Semiotics* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1984), 107.

someone else has suggested, but in the willingness and ability to identify a 'perceptual problem' and provide a 'perceptual solution'. Multiple affordances mean that similar constructions might be used for different purposes in different dramatic contexts.

When one internal joint is markedly over-articulated, this results in a line containing a caesura. In the following line we find over-articulation of the foot joint at the fourth metrical position:

w—S w-----S w---S w---S w-----S (*Neutral Line*)

If you have tears, | prepare to shed them now (Julius Caesar, 3.2.167)

Here, we find over-articulation of the foot joint at the eighth metrical position:

w--S w--S w----S w—S w----S (*Neutral Line*)

If music be the food of love, | play on (Twelfth Night, 1.1.1)

In the next line quoted, we see not the over-articulation of a foot joint but the marked over-articulation of a positional joint, resulting in a caesura at the fifth metrical position:



w----S w-S w-----S w—S w-S (Neutral Line)

This other Eden, | demi-paradise (Richard II, 2.1.42)

A caesura can occur at any of the nine internal joints of the Neutral Line pattern. In assessing the potential effect of the caesura on the rhythmical affordances of the line, the first questions to ask are to do with how far through the line the caesura occurs, the rank of the joint that is being over-articulated and the internal structures of the new perceptual subunits (hemistichs) produced by the caesura.

Within the Neutral Line of iambic pentameter there is no obligatory caesura and nowhere for a caesura to be introduced that can create two equal hemistichs. The closest one can get to splitting a line of iambic pentameter down the middle (without also splitting a foot down the middle) is to introduce a caesura at either the fourth or the sixth metrical position. In preserving the integrity of the line as a unit, a fourth position break seems to have certain advantages over one in the sixth position. Tsur explains that it is easier to maintain the sense of a complete unit if “when two or more co-ordinate items follow one another, the longer member comes last”<sup>558</sup>. This is because the shorter section takes less mental space to process. Putting the shorter member first enables “the listener to handle the preliminary processing of this member, while new information is still presented to him by the speaker”<sup>559</sup>.

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<sup>558</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 117.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

This ‘perceptual preference’ for the shorter hemistich to come first feeds into Tsur’s notion of metrical “requiredness”<sup>560</sup>. Any caesura is a source of tension within the verse line because “the line exerts a pressure for completion upon which the caesura obtrudes”<sup>561</sup>. However, because a longer first hemistich puts increased strain on the Working Memory, a later caesura will generate a higher level of ‘requiredness’; that is, if the performer is actively engaged in trying to maintain the gestalt of the verse line, he or she will feel a stronger compulsion to complete the line quickly when dealing with late caesura placement. One of the most thorough studies of ‘pause patterns’ within iambic pentameter is that provided by Ants Oras<sup>562</sup>. When it comes to caesura placement, Oras draws a similar conclusion to Tsur’s: “After a line has achieved a certain momentum, for which space is needed, a pause... cutting into the vigorous rhythmical movement, strikes the reader or listener with greater unexpectedness and seems more emphatic”<sup>563</sup>. This gives us good reason to assume that a fourth position joint is slightly ‘easier’ to handle than one in the sixth position. Oras’ observation suggests that a joint earlier in the line than the fourth position might have problems of its own: ‘space is needed’ for the momentum of the line to be established.

The idea of over-articulation impeding the forward momentum of the Neutral Line has been discussed already and provides an easier way for the nature of the ‘perceptual problem’ to be understood than does an explanation based on Tsur’s discussion of the cognitive processes involved. For the rhythmical performer, the

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>562</sup> Ants Oras, *Pause Patterns in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama: An Experiment in Prosody* (Gainesville: University of Florida Monographs, 1960).

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 16.

caesura must be marked one way or another, otherwise the performance will fail to do justice to the pattern of the Natural Line. One way of marking the caesura is to include a pause, which is likely to be experienced as resisting the forward momentum of the Neutral Line. The greater the forward momentum of the line up until the caesura, the more effort it will require to suspend or slow that momentum. The later in the line the caesura occurs, the more opportunity the line will have had to gain that momentum. This may result in a rhythmical performance in which the movement of a short hemistich following a late caesura is notably Strong/Quick; bursting forth from a brief pause that tries and fails to hold back the powerful forward current of the Neutral Line. If the actor wishes to reject this rhythmical performance – perhaps because it does not lead to a plausible and playable choice within the dramatic context – then other options may be available. The actor might find a way of marking the caesura without leaving a pause – a terminal pitch contour or ‘falling inflection’ perhaps – thereby creating a performance that produces different sensations of movement. The construction might afford opportunities to resist the forward momentum of the Neutral Line at earlier points, preventing the ‘pressure for completion’ from building up to the same degree and thereby allowing greater opportunity for a Sustained movement in the final portion of the line. The only restriction on the performer’s creativity is that some form of ‘perceptual solution’ is provided to the specific ‘perceptual problems’ presented by the particular line or lines.

For a joint of the Neutral Line to be matched with a caesura is, in terms of the perceptual hierarchy or units and subunits, a promotion for the joint in question. To return to the example of:

Put out the light, | and then put out the light

The joint at the fourth metrical position has gone from being in charge of a single Neutral Line foot to being the head of a whole hemistich within the integrated gestalt of the verse line. Notable, however, is the fact the promoted joint has only moved up in the pecking order by one rank. The authority of the feet is not unduly challenged. If, in contrast, the promoted joint is not a foot joint but a mere positional joint then the challenge to the perceptual hierarchy of the Neutral Line has the potential to be much more disruptive:

On this side my hand, | and on that side yours

(Richard II, 4.1.183)

The positional joint at the fifth position has been promoted above its station. When a foot joint is over-articulated it is relatively easy to articulate the caesura whilst continuing to give 'weight' to the remaining foot joints of the line. Here the integrity of the third foot has been compromised. Any attempt to maintain the regular articulation of the foot joints will jeopardise the integrity of the newly-formed hemistichs, which now outrank the feet in the perceptual hierarchy of the verse line gestalt. Should the foot joints be treated as yielding to the new order or as resisting it? The former option will mean that our sense of the neatly ordered, regularised internal structure of the Neutral Line is diminished. The gestalt of the verse line can survive this, with the irregular hemistichs still providing a relatively 'simple' structure. The tension can be maintained if the performer continues to

make the foot joint structure ‘accessible to awareness’: feeling each joint yield as the Natural Line flows through it. Such relaxation of the foot joints seems to involve greater fluidity in the movement of the line – a greater degree of Free Flow – and the irregularity of the hemistichs suggests a movement through space that is both concave and convex – a Flexible movement. The authority of the metrical feet may be undermined, not only by the promotion of positional joints but by the under-articulation of their own perceptual boundaries. In the following line from *Richard II* there is under-articulation at all of the internal foot joints and a caesura at the fifth metrical position:

w----S w---S w----S w---S w---S (Neutral Line)

This oth~er Ed~en, | de~mi-par~adise,

In such circumstances, the actor may want to make performance choices in which the Neutral Line is felt to yield to the flow of the Natural Line. In other circumstances, there may be great benefit in using the Neutral Line structure to fight back, forcing the Natural Line – if it is to insist upon Flexibility – to yank the joints almost out of their sockets:

You cat~aracts and hurr~ican~oes | spout ~ (King Lear, 3.2.2)

When foot joints are under-articulated there is a range of *perceivable* performance choices available to the actor. The Neutral Line joints might be treated as yielding to the Natural Line. Alternatively, the Neutral Line pattern might contend with the

disruption, dragging the Natural Line in the direction of convergence, stretching and slowing those speech sounds that try to usurp the authority of the joint structure. Or, perhaps, the speech sounds of the Natural Line might resist being stretched to the extent that the sounds are experienced as ‘bursting through’ the would-be barriers of the foot joints. Every divergence between the two patterns is an opportunity for performers to exercise their creativity; having brought to attention the ways in which the patterns might move individually, the task of the performer is to make those patterns dance.

Let us return to the example explored in the previous section:

^ Stay, the king hath thrown his warder down

We began by looking at the bone structure of the line, noting several possibilities for handling the unoccupied first metrical position of the line. If we now examine the joint articulation, we see further divergences between the Neutral and Natural Line patterns. There is a marked phrasal boundary articulating the first foot joint (the second metrical position) and the fourth foot joint (the eighth metrical position) is under-articulated:

w---S    w----S    w-----S    w---S    w-----S    (*Neutral Line*)

^ Stay, | the king hath thrown his war~der down

The possibility of a 'stop' so early in the line could be used to add to the sense of a Strong/Quick 'jolt' engendered by the unoccupied first position. The 'readiness to stop' displayed in such a choice adds a further degree of Bound Flow. The early position of the caesura means that the pressure to continue at the break stems not from built-up momentum but from the danger that the first syllable could feel extrametrical, with the four-foot second hemistich sizable enough to hold its own as a 'metrical moment'. A sudden, clear break in the line could be achieved by a glottal stop. Alternatively, if the performer chose to deal with the unoccupied position by stretching the first syllable, then a caesura marked by an 'elaborate' terminal pitch contour might be used to increase the sense of 'pulling back' at the beginning of the line.

At the eighth position, given the relatively strong articulation of the line up until this point, the possibility of the foot joint yielding completely to the forward movement of the word strikes me as unlikely. Other possibilities include the resistance offered by the foot joint being used to prolong the first syllable of "warder" as it pushes its way through to the ninth position, or the word 'crashing through' the barrier of the foot joint. The last of these seems to require either a good build of momentum up until the resistant joint or a sudden swell of strength in the eight position. I return to this line and these possibilities in the next section.

#### 4.4 Muscle Tone

The Neutral Line has a pattern of alternating weak and strong positions. The speech stress patterns of the Natural Line can converge with and diverge from this

structure in a significant number of different ways: Brian Boyd calculates 59,049 possible variations (“some, of course, wildly more improbable than others”<sup>564</sup>). Part of the reason for this is that levels of speech stress do not fall into the neat binary opposition of weak and strong presented by the Neutral Line and so one of the questions for any system of metrical analysis is how many different levels of speech stress to acknowledge. I allow for five levels. Three of these are common to most metrists and will be marked as follows:

x        =        weak stress

\        =        intermediary stress

/        =        strong stress

To these I add a second intermediary level of stress marked with a capitalised X – this is a speech stress that is somewhat stronger than x but not prominent enough to warrant \ – and a higher level of stress marked //. Wherever possible, I will stick to the familiar three-level system. Even using a system of five rather than two or three levels of speech stress is somewhat reductive: not every speech stress marked / will receive the same level of prominence within an utterance. However, I hope that these levels allow for sufficiently fine distinctions for the notation to be adequately detailed while not using so many different ‘hieroglyphs’ as to render the reading unreadable.

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<sup>564</sup> Boyd, *Why Lyrics Last*, 37.



Stress, as I use the term here, does not simply refer to ‘loudness’. Prominence can be achieved through amplitude but also through the use of acoustic cues such as “intonational inflection, pitch, duration”<sup>565</sup>. There is significant crossover between the vocal devices employed to achieve stress and those used to achieve clear-cut articulation: a prominent sound will often be perceived as ‘separated’ from its surroundings, and a sound that is clearly articulated will often be perceived as prominent. There is also a connection in that, as we have discovered in discussing Tsur’s notion of the ‘stress valley’, divergent stress patterns can be incorporated into the gestalt of the verse line through the creation of rhythmical figures. A rhythmical figure can be regarded as a ‘synthetic’ perceptual subunit – that is, as a subunit that is engendered by the interaction of the Neutral and Natural Line patterns – and, as such, will need to be incorporated into the articulatory pattern of a rhythmical performance, affecting the joint structure just as much as the muscle tone of the verse line. In the following example:

w---S w----S w-----S w-----S w-----S (Neutral Line)

x / x / x / // x x //

But let the fam~ish’d flesh [slide from~the bone] (Timon, 4.3.531)

the creation of a rhythmical figure (‘stress valley’) also creates a potential caesura at the sixth metrical position, though this need not be marked by a significant pause. The emphatic grouping of the figure and the relatively minor word boundary at the eighth position also invites the under-articulation of the fourth foot joint. The choice of emphatic stress at the seventh position arises from the need for the

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<sup>565</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 8.

divergent speech stress to overcome – to momentarily ‘snap’ and break free from – the resistance of the Neutral Line (which would, given half a chance, suppress a strong speech stress at that point in the line). Once that choice has been made, the emphatic stress at the tenth position seems almost inevitable as the voice ‘sweeps through the valley’ to re-converge with the Neutral Line, finally and forcefully at the tenth metrical position.

All else being equal, the rhythmical figure of the stress valley – a common occurrence in lines of iambic pentameter – seems to engender a sensation of Flexible movement, ‘curving’ away from the Neutral Line pattern. The question is whether it ‘snaps’ the tension or whether it ‘works through it’. In the former case, the divergent pattern will need to be sharply articulated, separating and foregrounding the rhythmical figure. Strength is needed to enforce this separation and the need to complete the figure before the Neutral Line pattern re-exerts itself seems to compel the movement to be Quick. Flexible/Strong/Quick is a Slashing Working Action. If the articulation of the pattern is less clear-cut, i.e. if the onset of the divergent pattern resists but does not ‘snap’ the tension with the Neutral Line, then this creates what I shall call a ‘group’ rather than a figure. Here the Quick onward rush is impeded by the ongoing exertions of the Neutral Line, drawing the rhythmical group back towards convergence. If the Neutral Line is allowed to be too dominant then the divergent pattern will be lost altogether (“slides-FROM the-BONE”), but if the divergence holds its own then the pattern might be realised as a Wring. The affordance of a Slashing movement might be utilised in Juliet’s:

[Gallop~apace], you fi~ery-foot~ed steeds

The emphatic rhythmical figure followed by the words of the Natural Line ‘bursting through’ the foot joints at the sixth and eighth positions might be used to embody Strong/Quick/Flexible movement throughout the line, with the Slashing of the verse whipping the reluctant horses to the West. This is not the only way of performing the lines but it is a perceivable choice.

Not every divergence in the muscle tone of a verse line seems to require the creation of a rhythmical figure. This is primarily a question of whether the divergence can be ‘contained’ by the Neutral Line structure or demands the reorganisation of the gestalt. If an alternating pattern of relatively weak and strong stress can be maintained, then – all else being equal – the foot joints should be able to cope with the strain. In some cases, a convergent delivery style might, with some effort, drag potentially divergent stresses back into line. In others, the performer might actively choose a divergent delivery style.

Peter Groves highlights a construction called a “golden line”<sup>566</sup>. This construct sees strong stresses occupying the second, sixth and tenth positions with relatively weak stresses occupying the fourth and eighth. The following lines are examples:

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<sup>566</sup> Groves, *Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare*, 63.

Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note (A Midsummer Night's Dream, 3.1.132)

My bounty is as boundless as the sea (Romeo and Juliet, 2.2.133)

The quality of mercy is not strained (Merchant of Venice, 4.1.182)

Groves credits this construction with “a peculiarly even, ordered and tranquil rhythm... used to suggest simplicity and serenity”<sup>567</sup>. Wright, however, observes similar structures in Chaucer’s verse and comments on the speed with which such lines move and on the fact that this swift movement through the ‘demoted’ strong positions might throw extra ‘weight’ onto the remaining stresses of the line<sup>568</sup>. If we apply some of the principles that we have been exploring here, both Groves’ ‘serene’ movement and the fast-flowing movement observed by Wright become available to the performer.

I have noted that there is a degree of crossover between the vocal devices used to achieve stress and those that are used for articulation. If the relatively weak syllables in the fourth and eighth positions are lengthened slightly, they become prominent enough to appear convergent with the strong metrical positions they occupy. At the same time, their relative quietness replaces the regular march of high amplitude stress with a softer, more Flexible sense of undulation.

Lengthening will also give a degree of articulation to the foot joints, avoiding the

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 21.

need for the emphatic grouping of rhythmical figures. Such Sustained/Flexible/Free movement leads to Floating and Wringing Working Actions. If, on the other hand, both stress and articulation are denied to the weaker syllables, then the creation of rhythmical groups and figures seems more likely, with the voice racing through the line, breaking free of the Neutral Line in the divergent patterns and then giving emphatic stress and articulation to those syllables that are able to affirm the metre. This lends itself more readily to sequences of Flicks and Slashes than it does to Floats and Wrings. Actors will base their decisions not on the affordances of the verse viewed in isolation but on how those affordances might be useful within a particular dramatic context.

If we turn once more to the example of:

Stay, the king hath thrown his warder down

we find that, in terms of its muscle tone, the line is fairly convergent. In fact, the main divergences may result not from the stress pattern itself, but as by-products of perceptual features that have been noted in earlier descriptions. The performance choice relating to the unoccupied first position might throw extra prominence onto the stressed syllable in the second and the choice relating to the under-articulated fourth foot joint might similarly throw extra prominence onto the stressed syllables in the eighth and tenth, with the extra stress on the tenth ensuring that the articulatory effort dedicated to the previous stress (if that syllable is noticeably 'stretched') does not overshadow the line-ending:

w---S    w---S    w-----S    w----S    w-----S    (*Neutral Line*)

//    x    /    x    /    x    //    x    //

^ Stay, | the king hath thrown his war~der down

We may have reason to modify this analysis further when we have taken the fourth Metrical Factor into consideration.

#### 4.5 Muscle Tissue

In examining the muscle tissue of a verse line, our interest is in the way that the speech sounds of the Natural Line might modify our analysis of the other Metrical Factors, shape the rhythmical affordances that the construction presents and guide our choices between those affordances. This final Metrical Factor is different in kind to the previous three. It cannot, in itself, be either convergent or divergent. Its appreciation rests on having brought other perceptual features to attention and so, to an even greater degree than the features discussed thus far, it is best understood on a case-by-case basis.

One of the ways in which the muscle tissue of the line might modify our analysis is when repeated speech sounds give extra prominence to certain syllables, thereby inviting a higher level of speech stress. Strong alliteration is one device that might shape our reading in just such a way:

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds

The alliterative /f/ sounds might afford multiple uses, amenable to increases in both amplitude and duration, but their prominence insists that their presence should be felt. Speech sound patterns will play their part in shaping an actor's articulation of a line, with crisp final consonants offering different opportunities to long open vowels. The former might be taken as an invitation for Strong/Direct movements from one joint to the next, whereas the latter may encourage articulation through marked deceleration and elaborate pitch contours.

The relative difficulty or ease of articulation – not of the joint structure necessarily but of the sound patterns themselves – will have a marked effect on our appreciation of the Motion Factor of Flow. Free Flow is described as a “streaming, unarrestable fluidity of movement”<sup>569</sup> whereas Bound Flow displays a “constant readiness to stop”<sup>570</sup>. In the rhythmical performance of verse, the sensation of Flow will be affected by the degree to which the speech sounds encourage fluidity of voice and breath – through resonant long vowels, diphthongs, liquids and sonorants – and the degree to which the voice and breath are forced to stop and strain by harsh consonant clusters, dentals, plosives and fricatives.

If we return once again to the line from *Richard II*:

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<sup>569</sup> Rudolf Laban and William Carpenter, cited in Fettes, *A Peopled Labyrinth*, 332.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

Stay, the king hath thrown his warder down

The long vowel of the first syllable and its lack of a nice, crisp final consonant affect the choices we might make for dealing with the unoccupied first position. The option of lengthening the speech sound in order to create a sense of its occupying both positions seems like a strong contender. This would not only deal with the divergent bone structure, the increased duration of the sound would help to address the over-articulation of the first foot joint. The option of the Strong/Quick ‘jolt’ is by no means discounted, however. The lack of a final consonant would mean that the foot joint would have to be articulated by a marked pause, a steeply falling pitch contour or by a glottal stop that would strangle the sound and impede any sense of Free Flow.

At the fifth position we find another example of how the muscle tissue of a line can modify our reading of it. The positional joint is matched by abutting speech sounds: “*hath thrown*”. If the reader is to avoid slurring the words together then this necessitates a “hiatus”<sup>571</sup> and, as a result, the positional joint might be considered over-articulated.

The under-articulated joint at the eighth position is marked by a long vowel following the relatively ‘soft’ sound of the voiced labio-velar approximant. This combination affords prolongation but does not naturally seem to lend itself to the

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<sup>571</sup> Beum and Shapiro, *The Prosody Handbook*, 84.



kind of Quick forward motion that might ‘burst’ through the foot joint. The second syllable of the word, intruding into the final foot, might also need careful handling. The schwa, unaccompanied, at least in a Standard English pronunciation, by a closing consonant, might easily under-articulate the word boundary, resulting in something called ‘warderdown’ (a distant cousin of eiderdown) being tossed about the place by the royal hand of Richard. The actor may, therefore, have to employ some of the tools of over-articulation to ensure that the word boundary is preserved.

With a survey of the muscle tissue of the line added to the analysis we can now begin to make some performance choices. One of the options for dealing with the unoccupied first position is to enact a silent offbeat, creating the sensation of ‘leaping onto’ or ‘grabbing hold of’ the verse line as it begins to move. This is followed by the over-articulation of the first foot boundary, possibly by means of a glottal stop, thus mitigating the need for a marked pause that might, in such an early position, compromise the integrity of the verse line gestalt. The long second hemistich begins with a convergent, articulated foot and is followed by one that is over-articulated at the positional boundary. This over-articulation does not appear to be so pronounced as to break the line or diverge from the organisational structure of the metrical feet. However, it may give slight additional prominence to the syllable in the fifth position and create a sense of the Natural Line ‘pulling back’ against the forward movement of the Neutral Line. The under-articulation of the fourth foot joint might be achieved by ‘stretching’ the speech sound in the eighth position. The final foot might also be slowed by the over-articulation of its internal positional joint. A rhythmical performance based on this blueprint seems to

engender a two part movement: an initial Punch (Strong/Direct/Quick) followed by a Press (Strong/Direct/Sustained).

//     x   /   X     /     x   //   x   //

^ Stay, | the king hath\_thrown his ward~er\_down

Such a reading may not be the only one available to the actor, but it would constitute a perceivable performance choice. I submit that this is also a plausible and a playable performance choice. The speaker, the Lord Marshal, has the urgent task of stopping the fight that is about to take place between Mowbray and Bolingbroke. The cue for his action is the throwing down of said 'warder' by King Richard. The two combatants have already stepped forward and the king intervenes at the very last moment. The Lord Marshal's immediate need, then, is to halt these men at arms. The activity 'to halt' attached to a Punching Working Action of, say, 'grabbing' or 'yanking' is playable and seems to be logical and coherent for the character in the scene. Given that the two men have been baying for one another's blood, this initial Punch might be followed immediately by an activity such as 'to subdue' or 'to chasten' with a Pressing Working Action. This is certainly playable and also seems plausible within the dramatic context. We have, then, a candidate for a plausible, perceivable and playable acting choice: a rhythmical performance in which the verse and the action are linked by an embodied understanding of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor.

## Chapter 5: Playing the Game

### 5.1 Playing the Game

In this chapter I build on my previous analysis by offering examples of an ‘actorly approach’<sup>572</sup> to lines of Shakespearean dramatic verse. I apply the analytical tools of the Anatomical Approach, and the principles of the Verse Psychology Game and the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, to make plausible, perceivable and playable choices. These examples are not intended as ‘correct’ interpretations, but as my own personal readings, using the theories and techniques that I have developed. Throughout this chapter and the next I make extensive use of “self-description”<sup>573</sup> to record my experiences of working within the framework of the Verse Psychology Game. Sections based on notes taken at the time of carrying out these investigations are presented in shaded text boxes.

If I can play the game successfully using Shakespearean text, then this has a number of important connotations:

- It demonstrates that by playing the Verse Psychology Game it is possible to establish and maintain a mutually-reinforcing, ‘symbiotic’ relationship between the rhythms of dramatic verse and the tempi of dramatic action.

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<sup>572</sup> By ‘actorly approach’ I mean that I examine the verse from the perspective of making plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices. I do not mean to suggest that the detailed analysis offered in this chapter is a suitable model for actors to use in their own practical work.

<sup>573</sup> Smith and Dean, *Practice-Led Research*, 25.

- It shows that the Anatomical Approach can be an effective tool for metrical analysis, and that playing the game using this approach might therefore be a useful training *exercise* to expand the rhythmic competence and ‘sensitivity’ of the playwright-as-gamewright.
- It suggests that it should be possible to compose, revise and evaluate original dramatic verse on the basis of its performative potential.
- It lays the foundations for a new approach to interpreting metrical dramatic verse for performance.

Playing the game successfully with this text does not imply that this approach is ‘authentic’ nor that alternative approaches are ‘wrong’ or ‘inferior’. Just as the activities I ascribe to lines are choices rather than prescriptions, so the decision to play the Verse Psychology Game using Shakespeare’s verse is, itself, a choice. A broader discussion of the relative merits of non- or anti-Stanislavskian approaches to Shakespeare is beyond the scope of this study.

In order to give a detailed account of my analysis it is necessary to focus on a small number of examples. The lines and excerpts have therefore been chosen to address particular, common challenges. In the first example, I look at a line from *Hamlet* that might be taken as ‘emotional expression’ rather than action. The second example, from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, might be taken as ‘lyrical’. The third and fourth examples, from *Othello* and *Macbeth* respectively, are shared lines: sometimes regarded as ‘hidden stage directions’ that prescribe performance choices. The final example is an excerpt from *Richard III* in which the ‘formal’

construction might be thought of as ‘artificial’. In each case, I attempt to reinterpret the lines to produce plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices.

## 5.2 Anger Management

George T. Wright makes much of Shakespeare’s ability to create verse that expresses intense emotion. He gives particular attention to examples of furious anger, although he does go on to note that “rage is not the only emotion that heats up the verse; fear, love, remorse, revenge, anguish or joy may have the same effect”<sup>574</sup>. Of this list, revenge seems to be the odd one out, though, given that one of the examples of anger that Wright offers is a line of Hamlet’s, perhaps he sees reason to suppose that revenge might be felt without any action being taken. The line that Wright quotes is:

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

(Hamlet, 2.2.583)


That Hamlet should be angry at this moment seems plausible: the dramatic circumstances make it ‘logical and coherent’. That the verse line in question might be experienced as somewhat turbulent is also, I suggest, readily apparent. The issue for me, as a player of the Verse Psychology Game, is that ‘anger’ is not an activity: it is not a playable choice.

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<sup>574</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 243.

Wright's main point about this line is about the emphatic stress that he ascribes to "villain", which repeats the final word of the previous line ("Bloody, bawdy villain!"): "Sometimes the strongly stressed syllables rise out of a series of fairly strongly stressed ones, like sudden dramatic peaks in a range of mountains... The skill with which Shakespeare allows such focal words to shape the utterance shows how aware he is that in speech we single out, particularly at moments of emotion, the words and syllables that seem specially empowered to carry the force of our feeling..."<sup>575</sup>

Wright cites this line in passing, as one example of many, and is no doubt aware that the repeated word is not the only feature of the line that gives it its rhythmical quality. Following the Anatomical Approach allows me to bring a number of other features to my attention.

The following section is a record of my own attempt to interpret Hamlet's line in accordance with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game. Vocal explorations of the line are included as Track 1 of the CD attached to this thesis and readings accompanied by an audio recording are marked with the symbol: 

*Bone Structure:* *The Natural Line is made up of thirteen syllables. This is a 'perceptual problem' because the Neutral Line of iambic pentameter has only ten metrical positions. Such an overabundance of syllables leads me to question whether the line should be treated as iambic pentameter at all; it is, after all, not*

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 242–43.

*unknown to find lines of iambic hexameter in Shakespeare's plays. I choose, however, to continue to treat the line as iambic pentameter. Two of the 'extra' syllables seem to belong to the words "treacherous" and "lecherous". If I treat these as disyllabic words – eliding the second syllable of each word – then the only divergence I find in the bone structure is a tailed ending:*

*x / x / x / x / x / (x)*

*Remorseless, treach'rous, lech'rous, kindless villain!*

*I suggest that to eliminate the divergent syllables entirely is to evade rather than to 'solve' the 'perceptual problem' by using the perceptual features of the construction. What I can do instead is treat the line as exhibiting disyllabic occupancy of both the fifth and seventh metrical positions:*

*x / x / (x x) / (x x) / x / (x)*

*Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!*

*Such an analysis of the bone structure raises questions as to how to create a rhythmical performance. Should I try to slow the forward motion of the Neutral Line in order to allow time for the extra syllables or, on the contrary, should I quicken those syllables in order to keep pace? When it comes to the tailed ending should the final word of the Natural Line 'burst through' the joint at the tenth position? Should an elaborate pitch contour be employed to create the sensation of the word 'curving' its way around the joint? Might the word 'stretch' and decelerate so that the authority of the joint is felt and acknowledged?*

Joint Articulation: The first thing I notice here is under-articulation at each of the even numbered metrical positions: every single one of the foot joints is violated by the Natural Line structure. In contrast, the positional joints at the third, fifth, seventh (and perhaps even the ninth) positions are slightly over-articulated, with major word boundaries and minor phrasal boundaries occurring mid-foot.

w----S    w-----S    w-----S    w-----S    w----S

Remorse~less, | treach~erous, | lech~erous, | kind~less vill~(ain!)

The divergences at the foot joints raise similar questions to the tailed ending: might the Natural Line power through them, curl around them, slow down for them? The over-articulated positional joints raise further questions. Might they be marked by pauses? Such pauses could undermine the internal structure of the gestalt and its integrity as a perceptual whole. Can they be marked by emphatic, clear-cut vocal articulation? Can the speech sounds that coincide with these joints be extended to give a sense of articulation or 'stopping' without actually pausing or 'cutting into' the flow of sound?

Muscle Tone: Aside from the additional weak stresses that have been identified, I find little in the way of divergence here. Every strong position is matched with a strong stress and every weak position is matched with a weak stress or pair of weak stresses. Emphasising the convergent regularity of the strong stresses by



*exploiting, as in accentual verse, the isochronic principle of even time intervals between prominent syllables might be a useful way of reinforcing the gestalt of the verse line. If I wish to utilise this regular 'drum beat', then this will affect my choices regarding the disyllabic occupancy of the fifth and seventh positions: either I must quicken the syllables or the forward momentum of the Neutral Line must be 'pulled back' throughout the entire verse line. The repetition and the importance of the final word of the line might encourage me to give that word an especially strong stress.*

*Muscle Tissue:* *The most noticeable feature of the line here is the high level of sibilance, with all but the last word ending on /s/, another /s/ in "remorseless" and the sibilant affricates of "treacherous" and lecherous". Sibilants afford prolongation and the slight extension of the repeated /s/ sounds at the word endings might help to mark the over-articulation of the positional joints without the need for pauses. The first four word onsets alternate between liquid consonants and voiceless stops. This feature might be used to create a sense of the line moving 'back and forth' or 'up and down'. The fact that the final word discontinues this pattern and that of final /s/ sounds might lend further support to Wright's claim that "villain" stands out from the crowd. Eleven of the thirteen vowel sounds are short, and will therefore resist elongation. The repeated sounds of "treacherous" and "lecherous", bunched together as they are, may feel slightly awkward to articulate, particularly if taken at speed.*

*Having brought all of these features to my attention, I can make choices as to how they are to be incorporated into a rhythmical performance of the verse line. In*

accordance with the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, I suggest that this verse construction affords a rhythmical performance which can be described as a series of Slashes and that to treat the line in such a way constitutes a perceivable performance choice.

w---S    w-----S    w-----S    w-----S    w---S

x   /    x       //   (x x)   /    (x x)   //   x   //   (x)

Remorse~less, | treach~erous, | lech~erous, | kind~less vill~ain! 🔊

The instances of disyllabic occupancy can be used to Quicken the movement through the line. The ‘rushed’ articulation of the syllables in those positions registers the divergence whilst, at the time, the act of ‘compressing’ each pair of syllables into a single position maintains the sense of the Neutral Line pattern. The swift ‘sweep’ through these positions might also add a sense of Flexibility, acting as a pair of miniature ‘stress valleys’. If the Natural Line is treated as ‘bursting through’ the under-articulated joints (including the joint leading to the tailed line-ending) then this will further Quicken the movement of the verse. In order to maintain the Neutral Line’s resistance to this forward surge, I might give extra Weight to the strongly stressed speech sounds that complete each foot. The over-articulated positional joints can be marked by a slight extension of the sibilant fricatives at each of these joints. This allows the verse line to continue moving forwards and avoids jeopardising the integrity of the gestalt. At the same time, this continuing sequence of under and over-articulation create the sense of a strong-weak rather than a weak-strong organisation (what Wright might call a “trochaic

*inner rhythm*<sup>576</sup>), adding further *Flexibility* as the *Natural Line* order seems to twist away from that of the *Neutral Line*. The friction that the frequency of /s/ sounds introduces to the breath, further heightened by the repeated sibilant affricates in “treacherous” and “lecherous”, adds to a sense of *Bound Flow* – a feeling of ‘stickiness’ or ‘viscosity’ within the movement of the line. Throughout this, the five strong stresses in the five strong metrical position power through, reinforcing the gestalt of the verse line and lending *Strong Weight* its movement. The syllable in the tenth position receives the emphatically strong stress anticipated by Wright and, in my reading, I have given a little extra prominence to the strong stresses in the fourth and eighth positions in order to highlight the ‘back and forth’ of the alternating varieties of initial consonants. This creates a sequence of *Strong/Flexible/Quick/Bound Slashes*.

*Slashing*, like all of the *Working Actions*, has the potential to constitute a playable performance choice: it is a purposeful movement of the human body. The problem in this instance is that Hamlet is, as he himself has noted, alone. If the *Slashing* is goal-directed, there must be someone or something on the receiving end, otherwise it is simply the prosodic equivalent of flailing one’s arms about for no good reason. Whom might Hamlet be trying to affect? Himself? The audience? The absent figure of Claudius? Or must I accept that, when it comes to soliloquies, action is always suspended in favour of informing and emoting? As it happens, this line comes in the middle of a complex discussion of what it means to act – to pretend or to do something – and of the comparative merits of emotion and action, both in life and on stage. Having uttered this line, Hamlet seems to mock himself

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 213.

*(that, at least, might be active!) precisely for indulging in useless emotion. Surely, one might argue, the whole point of this line is that it displays pure emotional indulgence. I suggest otherwise.*

*There are differences of opinion amongst theatre practitioners as to whether an actor performing a soliloquy should talk to the audience directly<sup>577</sup>. If I, as the actor, do talk to the audience, then there are choices to make in terms of who the audience is to the character. Is the audience simply the audience? Is the audience 'cast' as another character?<sup>578</sup> Is the audience treated as an outward projection on an 'inner self', i.e. does Hamlet talk to himself through the audience, a bit like talking to oneself in a mirror? I choose the last of these options: Hamlet is talking to the audience but, ultimately, the person that he is trying to affect is Hamlet. In the build up to this line, Hamlet has been comparing his own performance to that of the player. He has been goading himself for his inability to live up to his role. What, then, is he doing at this moment? I suggest that it is plausible to say that Hamlet is not merely expressing emotion but trying to 'whip himself up' (Slashing) into the kind of vengeful passion that he thinks is required of him. The line is not simply 'rage' but an attempt to enrage. This is an active, playable choice. That a beat later Hamlet dismisses his own efforts as pathetic and futile does not alter the fact that, in this interpretation, at the moment when Hamlet utters the line he is actively engaged in trying to achieve something using the Slashing movement of the verse.*

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<sup>577</sup> Gaskill, *Words Into Action*, 56.

<sup>578</sup> See, for example, Dee Cannon, *In-Depth Acting* (London: Oberon Books Ltd., 2012), 86.

In identifying a Slashing movement as an affordance of the line, the detailed analysis offered above describes a series of features and decisions that an actor with even a moderate degree of rhythmic competence might deal with either instinctively and immediately or by a trial-and-error process of repeating the line until it 'sounds right'. Nevertheless, the ability to break down the features and affordances of the text in this way has a number of advantages. It allows us to understand the mechanics of prosodic movement and to move beyond a reliance on "mysterious intuitions"<sup>579</sup> or arbitrary 'prescriptions'. It allows us to build upon our intuitive awareness of the features of the line, to challenge our first impressions and to 'troubleshoot' when presented with constructions that give us difficulty.

This approach arms actors and writers, not with a set of readymade answers, but with a series of useful questions. By exploring different answers to those questions, one might use the same verse line to generate different qualities of movement. If the under-articulated foot joints of this line are incorporated into a rhythmical performance by stretching the speech sounds, then this may give rise to a sensation of Wringing rather than Slashing. 🔊 Such a performance choice is no less perceivable than the Slashing option discussed above. In this instance, the same perceptual features are identified, but the player of the game is providing a slightly different set of 'perceptual solutions' to the 'perceptual problems' that those features pose. In terms of playability, one might suggest that rather than 'whipping himself up', Hamlet is 'screwing up his courage'. The activity might be 'to embolden screwingly'.

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<sup>579</sup> Tsur, *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive?*, 3.

That the same analysis of the verse construction can provide multiple options for performance is evidence that the process of game-playing empowers actors to make informed decisions and to exercise their own artistic judgement. However, the constitutive rules of rhythmical performance and the Verse Psychology Game mean that the creative freedom of the actor must operate within certain boundaries: this is *gameplay* not *free play*. It would be very difficult, for instance, to use Hamlet's line to create a smooth Gliding movement without either 'neutralising' the perceptual features of the construction (eliding the extra syllable out of existence, for example) or destroying the gestalt of the verse line (by, say, allowing so much space at the over-articulated positional joints that tension between the patterns dissipates and the performance exceeds the limited capacity of the 'metrical moment'). Of course, one could try to impose any quality of movement onto virtually any construction, but such an imposition would not necessarily pass muster as a perceivable choice, i.e. a performance created through a series of rhythmically competent responses to the specific perceptual features of the verse. Within the framework of the Verse Psychology Game, neither text nor actor is enslaved to the other. We are dance partners; artistic collaborators in the creation of active rhythmical performances.

If I am unsure as to the 'perceivability' of a particular choice then one way of testing my analysis is to look at ways in which changing the line could make my choice more or less perceivable. Let's say, for example, that I am uncertain about my Slashing choice for Hamlet's line: could it not just as easily be treated as a series of Punches? Asking this question encourages me to reinvestigate my

original judgement that the line affords Flexible movement more readily than Direct movement.

One of the features that led me to treat the line as Flexible was the overabundance of syllables – or, at least, the syllabic ambiguity – provided by the words “treacherous” and “lecherous”. I suggested that ‘sweeping through’ the disyllabic occupancy of the fifth and seventh metrical positions gave rise to the sensation of miniature stress valleys; Flexible curves in the movement of the line. If that is the case, then replacing those words with ones that are unambiguously disyllabic should diminish the sense of Flexibility and create a line that better affords Direct, Punching movements:

Remorse~less, *heart~less*, *gut~less*, kind~less vill~ain!

Setting aside changes to meaning and focusing on the rhythmic potentialities, I do suggest that we are now closer to a line that affords Punching than we were to begin with. The potential for miniature stress valleys has been removed. The movement through “remorseless”, however, seems problematic for a Punching interpretation of the line. The weak-strong-weak pattern of the word – combined with a lack a crisp stop consonants within its muscle tissue – seems to invite a Flexible contour and makes it difficult to Punch through the foot joint without distorting the word and thereby undermining the Natural Line pattern. Separating the stress from the preceding syllable might alleviate this:

*O shame~less, heart~less, gut~less, kind~less vill~ain!*

Removing the initial syllable of the Natural Line altogether – thereby creating an ‘unoccupied first position’ and the potential for a ‘jolt’ – might further facilitate a Punching interpretation:

*Shame~less, heart~less, gut~less, kind~less vill~ain!* 🗣️

The aim of this exercise is not really to create a new line. If it were, then I would continue with my modifications. (The muscle tone of the line, for example, does not facilitate a Punching interpretation as effectively as it might do.) As it is, the aim of the exercise is to either support or challenge my decision to prefer a Slashing performance choice to a Punching one, and I believe that the exercise has been taken far enough to serve this purpose. By assuring myself that a Punching performance choice would be better served by changing the line, I reinforce my initial decision to discount that choice in favour of another. Furthermore, by exploring the alternative constructions, I hope to heighten my awareness of, and my sensitivity to, the Flexible affordances of the original line.

### 5.3 Playing Nicely

Not all dramatic activities are aggressive Slashes and Punches and so if iambic pentameter is to be used to embody a wide range of hyperactivity, then it must be



adaptable to more positive means of persuasion. Earlier, I cited a line of Titania's as a possible example of what Groves calls a 'golden line'.

Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note

A golden line is one in which the syllables occupying the fourth and eighth metrical positions receive a slightly lower level of stress than those in the second, sixth and tenth positions. Groves credits such lines with producing "a peculiarly even, ordered and tranquil rhythm," which is sometimes used to suggest "simplicity and serenity"<sup>580</sup>. Other examples include:

The quality of mercy is not strained

And

My bounty is as boundless as the sea

In this section I examine potential performance choices for Titania's line and vocal explorations of the line are included as Track 2 of the CD attached to this thesis.

Readings accompanied by an audio recording are marked with the symbol: 

Whether Titania's line qualifies as a golden line, depends on whether one can give more or less even levels of stress to "much" and "of", either by softening the

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<sup>580</sup> Groves, *Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare*, 63.

former or by ‘tilting’ the delivery in order to beef up the latter. When it comes to the lines belonging to Portia and Juliet, the gentle ‘tranquillity’ and ‘serenity’ anticipated by Groves may depend on a decent amount of ‘tilting’ to give weight to the syllables in the fourth and eighth positions. If they are treated as weak (x) stresses then one might be more likely to sweep through the strings of syllables rather swiftly.

In the following account, I begin by treating Titania’s line as ‘golden’. That being the case, the notation for the construction looks like this (with some leeway in the choice between \ and X notations):

w-----S w---S    w-S    w-----S w---S

x    / x \    x /    x \ x /

Mine ear is much enam~oured of thy note



*The Neutral and Natural Line patterns are convergent in terms of bone structure. The only divergence in the joints is the under-articulation of the foot joint at the sixth position. The mild divergence in the muscle tone is hardly a threat to the gestalt of the verse line, giving rise to a sensation of swaying undulation rather than fraught metrical tension. In looking at the muscle tissue, I notice a high frequency of extendable nasal consonants and that the only ‘hard’ stop consonant is the /t/ at the very end of the line. The line is also bookended by long vowel sounds; “mine ear” occupying the first two position and “thy note” occupying the final two.*

*If I negotiate the under-articulated joint at the sixth position by stretching the sounds rather than bursting through the joint (given the short vowel of the syllable this will involve prolonging the nasal consonants /n/ and /m/) then this contributes to a Sustained quality that is further maintained if I give just enough weight to the fourth and sixth positions to keep the steady pace and if I luxuriate somewhat in the copious extendable sounds of the line's muscle tissue. The alternation in the stress levels of the strong positions can generate a sense of Flexibility. The speech sounds lend themselves to a certain level of unctuousness but there is little to suggest Bound Flow. The long vowels and the stretched sounds at the under-articulated joint can be used to create warm, sensuous Weight, leaving the movement of this rhythmical performance somewhere between a relatively Light Wring and a relatively Strong Float. How might such a movement be employed as part of a plausible and playable activity?*

*In the scene, Titania has just been woken by Bottom's 'singing'. Bottom has the head of an ass at this point, but Titania's eyes have been dosed with Oberon's magical purple dye and so she falls in love/lust with Bottom immediately. In talking about what Titania might be feeling at this point, suggestions of love, passion and sexual arousal could all be deemed plausible. What she wants, it seems, is Bottom. Activities such as 'to seduce', 'to charm' or even 'to ensnare' might all be suited to the dramatic circumstances and could be played using the Sustained/Flexible movement of the line in an attempt to 'caress' Bottom or to 'reel him in', 'winding' the verse around him.*

*Such a performance might constitute a plausible, perceivable and playable choice. If, however, I dismiss the idea of treating the construction as a golden line then I could end up with something rather different. This means giving uneven levels of stress to the syllables in the fourth and eighth positions. “Much” might easily take a higher level of stress and “of” could be relegated as far as receiving a weak (x) stress. This creates a sequence of three consecutive weak stresses in the second part of the line. Such a sequence constitutes a much higher level of divergence and I may need to group the syllables of the second part of the line as a rhythmical figure – an irregular perceptual subunit – in order to preserve the integrity of the gestalt.*

x   /   x   /   x //   x   x x   //

*Mine ear is much [enam~oured of thy note]*



*This gives the effect of a long, sweeping ‘stress valley’ in the rhythmical figure. To foreground the figure as a divergent subunit of the gestalt it is also necessary to give a higher level of articulation to its initial boundary, creating a sense of over-articulation at the fourth position. This over-articulation can be achieved by deceleration on the approach to the boundary and stretching the speech sounds (the nasal consonant and the sibilant affricate) of “much”. Lending additional weight to the strong stresses in the sixth and tenth position helps to articulate the shape of the divergent figure. The movement of such a reading can be understood and experienced as a Sustained preparation followed by a Strong/Quick/Flexible/Free ‘swishing’ or ‘whipping’ as the convergence between the patterns is momentarily ‘snapped’ and then swiftly re-established at the line-ending.*

*In terms of the performance choice, the dramatic circumstances remain the same. Those wishing to assign emotional qualities to the character on the basis of the verse rhythm might talk of Titania's 'excitement', but a player of the Verse Psychology Game must look to use this Slashing movement actively. Titania still wants to make Bottom hers, but to read the line in this way means making a different choice of tactic. Like a cat playing with a ball of string, I might use the Sustained preparation as a moment to 'set myself' before a sudden 'pounce' or 'grab'. The activity might be described as 'to capture pouncingly'.*

Through my use of the Anatomical Approach I have identified two possible readings of the line. Both readings can be considered plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices and neither is inherently 'superior' to the other. Were I to play the part of Titania then, having identified these possibilities, my decision as to which reading to employ would be based on personal preference and on the collaborative, iterative processes of rehearsal. However, the analysis I have offered is not intended to be exhaustive and, even with two possibilities identified, I might still decide to explore alternatives.

I described my first reading of the line as either a relatively Light Wringing or a relatively Strong Floating. What, though, if I wanted to take the yielding quality of the line further, using it to embody a much Lighter Floating movement? To what extent does the line afford such a choice?

By elongating the speech sounds matched with strong metrical positions even more than I suggested in my initial reading, I might maintain an alternating stress pattern whilst Lightening the stressed syllables by reducing their amplitude. The potential stumbling block for such a reading is, I suggest, the word “enamoured”. The stressed syllable marks an under-articulated foot joint. If tension is to be maintained between the Neutral and Natural Line patterns then, of all the syllables matched with strong metrical positions, this one requires special attention: it must provide a ‘perceptual solution’ to the ‘perceptual problem’ of the under-articulated joint or, to put it another way, the divergence between the patterns must be ‘felt’ in the performance.

A ‘perceptual solution’ in which the relevant syllable ‘forces’ or ‘bursts’ its way through the under-articulated joint seems to require a level of contending energy that would undermine the sensation of a Float. A more yielding ‘perceptual solution’ might involve ‘stretching’ the syllable so that, rather than ‘fighting against’ the joint of the Neutral Line, it allows itself to be slowed and Sustained by it. The difficulty with such a reading of this line is that compared to the other prominent stresses in the performance – “ear” and “note” – the stressed syllable of “enamoured” is less amenable to such ‘stretching’. The /n/ and /m/ consonants can be extended but the short vowel is resistant. If prominent levels of stress throughout the line are being achieved through Light/Sustained ‘stretching’ of the relevant speech sounds, it is difficult to give this particular syllable the special prominence it requires to negotiate the divergence at the foot joint by using the same means. This perception can be further illustrated and tested by rewriting Shakespeare’s line in order to change its affordances. If we replace the word “enamoured” with “enthralled” (ignoring, for the purposes of the exercise, the need

to alter the word “of” as well) then the potential to give special prominence to the stressed syllable by ‘stretching’ it is increased.

One might therefore conclude that the line:

Mine ear is much [*enthralled*] of thy note

affords a yielding, Floating activity more readily than the original. Such rewriting of a line can be a useful testing mechanism, particularly when it comes to discounting a potential reading. If my analysis suggests that the line does not readily afford a particular performance choice, I can test this judgement by asking myself how the line could be changed to afford such a choice more effectively. The assumption here is that if my performance choice is best served by changing the line, then the line would be best served by changing my performance choice<sup>581</sup>.

However, discounting one performance choice is not the only outcome of this reinvestigation of the line and its affordances. It also serves to highlight new possibilities that involve maintaining a yielding Floating movement through most of the line and injecting a moment of contending energy into the word “enamoured”.

x / x X x // x X x /

Mine ear is much enam~oured of thy note



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<sup>581</sup> When it comes to one’s own writing, changing the line becomes not only an analytical exercise but a real possibility.

The question here concerns the means by which the additional contending energy is realised in performance. If the movement is experienced as simply getting Stronger through “enamoured” then this results in a Float that Strengthens to a Wring and then Lightens again to a Float. This suggests to me a ‘massaging’ movement. The activity might be ‘to arouse massagingly’. If, however, the movement through “enamoured” is treated as ‘bursting through’ the foot joint – with an injection of Strong/Quick energy – then this gives a different option again: a Float that is interrupted by a Slash or a relatively Strong Flick and then recovers back into Floating. This puts me in mind of the old parlour trick of whipping a table cloth out from underneath a set of crockery. The Floating here is really the preparation for and then the recovery from the main movement of the activity, which might be ‘to tease’ or ‘to excite’ ‘whippingly’.

My analysis has now produced four performance choices. They are all different from one another, but they are all Flexible in their movement. What if I wanted to make the line Direct? Could the line be treated as a Press, for example? I suggest that there are at least two obstacles to finding a perceivable choice for the line that could embody the sensation of a Pressing movement. The first is that “of” is matched with a strong metrical position. Throughout my analysis of the line I have varied the levels of stress assigned to the syllables matched with the fourth and eighth positions of the Neutral Line pattern – “much” and “of”. I have suggested that they are both able to receive an intermediate level of stress, but to treat them in this way creates an undulating movement in the line that seems to me too Flexible for a Press. Furthermore, having two Lighter stresses takes away from the



overall Strength of the line when it is treated as a single Sustained movement. It seems possible to give “much” a higher level of stress. Adding further Strong Weight to the line might be achieved by highlighting the contrast between “mine” and “thy”, upping the level of stress assigned to each. However, to ‘tilt’ the stress pattern of the performance to the extent that “of” receives a full stress seems odd (if not absurd) and if “of” receives a lower level of stress then this seems to create a ‘trough’ or ‘curve’ of Lighter and/or more Flexible movement through the syllables matched with the seventh, eighth and ninth metrical positions. This difficulty is exacerbated by its proximity to what I perceive to be the other major obstacle to a Pressing performance of the line: the movement of “enamoured” through the under-articulated foot joint at the sixth metrical position. The under-articulated joint disrupts the neatly ordered internal structure of the Neutral Line pattern and invites Flexibility as the speech sounds ‘curve’ around the joint and/or a Quick movement as the speech sounds ‘burst through’ the joint. Neither option encourages the Direct/Sustained movement of Pressing. The disruption might be mitigated by a very strongly articulated speech sound occupying the next strong metrical position. In this instance, however, the divergence in the joint articulation is more likely to highlight the subsequent divergence in the muscle tone: the lower level of stress on “of” might be experienced as a conspicuous ‘failure’ to reinforce the strict articulation of the Neutral Line’s internal structure. None of this is to say that it is impossible to impose a Pressing movement on the line, but it does suggest that, within the context of the Verse Psychology Game, there is good reason to prefer alternative readings. Moreover, a rewritten version such as:

Mine ear is much enthrall'd to thy fine note

or even:

O sing once more, thy note enthrals mine ear

might better afford a Pressing performance choice.

The fact that this analysis could continue, not only to explore different Working Actions but to examine minute variations in stress and articulation and their impact on the embodied experience of particular performance choices, is, I suggest, one of the great strengths of the Anatomical Approach as it might be employed within the context of the Verse Psychology Game. Players of the game do not need authoritarian prescriptions or the reductive rule-following of generative metrics. To explore the performative potential of dramatic verse in this way is not to arrive at 'correct' or 'incorrect' interpretations, but to engage in a process of informed decision-making.

#### 5.4 Seizing the Moment

Rokison notes that a number of commentators on Shakespearean verse-speaking make much of the use of shared lines<sup>582</sup>: single lines of iambic pentameter split between two or more speakers. Barton takes such a construction as a prime

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<sup>582</sup> Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*, 15–18.

example of a ‘hidden stage direction’ meaning “don’t pause here”<sup>583</sup>. Tsur’s notion of metrical requiredness offers an alternative perspective: lines with a late split – or ‘dislocated joint’ – exert a higher level of requiredness on the second hemistich and therefore require a Quick and/or Strong move from the second speaker in order to preserve the gestalt of the verse line. Conversely, constructions involving lower levels of requiredness exert less pressure for completion and may not, therefore, impel the second speaker to pick up the cue quite as eagerly. The positioning of the dislocation in the line must also be considered in terms of whether it gives over-articulation to a foot joint or a positional joint, with the latter posing a different kind of ‘perceptual problem’ by disturbing a foot as well as the line as a whole.

Wright observes that in the second portion of shared lines, “when the first half has been notably passionate, the effect is sometimes to tone it down again, to recall the outburst to its metrical connections”<sup>584</sup>. Wright is talking in terms of emotion, but the idea that shared lines offer the opportunity for the second speaker to change the movement quality of the line part-way through is intriguing and offers an alternative perspective to Hall’s generalisation that the task for the speakers of shared lines is always to create a sense of rhythmic continuity “in tempo, dynamic and volume”<sup>585</sup>. An example of a kind of ‘ruffling’ and then ‘smoothing’ of the verse line might be seen in the following shared line from *Othello*:

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<sup>583</sup> Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, 39.

<sup>584</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, 138.

<sup>585</sup> Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players*, 34.

OTHELLO: Not a jot, not a jot.

IAGO: I'faith, I fear it has.

(Othello, 3.3.219)

*A look at the bone structure reveals a twelve syllable Natural Line, resulting in the disyllabic occupancy of the first and third positions. The foot boundaries at the second and fourth positions are both over-articulated, the latter being the main caesura or dislocated joint of the line, and this over-articulation is aided by the clean voiceless stop consonant /t/ that marks them. The repetition of the words and the positioning of the dislocation encourages a slightly higher level of stress in the fourth position than in the second. If the disyllabic occupancy is handled by sweeping through the first and third positions swiftly, then this creates Quick/Flexible movement, with the sharp over-articulation at the foot joints and the difficulty in the vocal articulation of the repeated sounds contributing to a sensation of Bound 'readiness to stop'. Othello's hemistich might on this basis be understood and experienced as a pair of Flicks.*

*When it comes to Iago's hemistich, the fourth position dislocation generates a low level of metrical requiredness and so, whilst a gestalt-threatening long pause seems inadvisable, there is no pressure to hurry the second portion of the line. The second hemistich is convergent in its bone structure and its muscle tone. The foot joint at the sixth position is over-articulated. The syllable marking the over-articulation has two extendable consonant sounds and a long vowel, meaning that*

*a slight deceleration and stretching in the speech sounds can be employed to incorporate this relatively mild divergence into the rhythmical performance. In the fourth foot I find repetitions and slight modifications of the speech sounds of the third foot. The fricative /f/ is repeated, and if the first has been elongated slightly then I may wish to repeat that choice in the second instance as well. The short vowel of the fifth position is switched for its longer equivalent in the seventh position, which may further contribute to Sustained deceleration. The strong sixth and eighth positions both contain long vowel sounds, with the rising diphthong in the former followed by a falling diphthong in the latter. This sensation of rising and falling might be used to give a 'curved' quality to the movement through the hemistich. This 'curve' may not be pronounced enough to disrupt the Direct progression of the convergent feet, but it may help to 'soften' the movement through them. Such an analysis leads me to the conclusion that the second hemistich affords the movement of a 'stroking' Glide.*

*Can these perceivable movements – Othello's Flicking and Iago's Gliding response – be plausible and playable choices within the context of the scene? I suggest that they can. Iago has been planting the idea of Desdemona's infidelity in Othello's mind. He wants to provoke Othello to jealousy whilst all the while professing himself to be the general's 'honest' friend. He tells Othello that there is probably nothing to his suspicions about Desdemona and expresses concern that his words may have 'unintentionally' dashed Othello's spirits. In Othello's hemistich he tries to dismiss the suggestion, Flickingly, using the rhythm of the verse to 'bat away' or 'brush off' Iago and the ideas, images and feelings that his words have provoked. Iago counters this Quick dismissal by slowing and*

*smoothing the movement of the line. The activity, as is very often the case with Iago's endeavours, might have a double-edged quality. It might be taken as 'to soothe strokingly' but, at the same time, by preventing Othello from batting the idea away he can try to keep Othello's mind fixed on the thought of Desdemona's imagined betrayal.*

In the following example from *Macbeth*, we see a different dynamic:

MACBETH: *I dare do all that may become a man;*

*Who dares do more, is none.*

LADY MACBETH: *What beast was't then,*

*That made you break this enterprise to me?*

(*Macbeth*, 1.7.46-48)

*The largely convergent, Sustained/Direct progression of Macbeth's first line continues into his hemistich of the shared line. The movement through the articulated feet and the evenly-weighted strong positions of the hemistich can be slowed by the over-articulation at the fourth position. This suggests to me a Pressing quality or a particularly weighty Glide. The activity could be 'to control' or 'to dominate' as Macbeth seeks to exert authority over his wife and his own ambitions. The sixth position dislocation generates a relatively high level of requiredness and so there is more pressure on Lady Macbeth's hemistich to bring*

*the verse line to a swift conclusion. The joint at the line-ending is under-articulated, with only a relatively weak phrasal boundary and the final position occupied by a syllable that does not naturally attract a high level of stress. ‘Tilting’ the delivery to give “then” a slight stress might give some definition to the line-ending without impeding the forward momentum of the Natural Line. “Beast” in the eighth position might attract an exceptionally high level of stress, emphasising the opposition to “man” and anticipating the alliteration with “break” in the following line. The repeated combination of /s/ and /t/ consonants in the ninth position could also attract relatively high level of stress, creating the sense of a steep ‘stress peak’ rather than the more familiar ‘stress valley’:*

x   //   \   X  
 | What beast was’t then~

*This could be used as a Strong Slashing movement, as Lady Macbeth reacts to her husband’s attempts to back out of their plans by ‘smacking’ him with the second hemistich and destroying the even tempo that he has tried to instil in the verse.*

Again, the interpretations offered here are possibilities rather than prescriptions. Nevertheless, these examples serve to demonstrate that changing the movement qualities of a line part way through can be an active, dramatic exchange and not merely an ‘expression’ or ‘indication’ of the emotional temperature of the scene. By applying the principles of the Verse Psychology Game we are able to unlock the performative, hyperactive potential of such constructions.

### 5.5 Richard and Anne

What follows is a short excerpt from Act I Scene II of *Richard III*. Richard has just accosted the grieving widow Lady Anne, who is accompanying the corpse of King Henry – killed by Richard – as it is taken to be buried. Anne makes it quite clear that she wants Richard to leave, calling him a whole host of diabolical names.

Richard, however, is unwilling to make an exit:

**RICHARD**            Lady, you know no rules of charity,  
  
                                 Which renders good for bad, blessings for curses.

**ANNE**                Villain, thou know'st no law of God nor man.  
  
                                 No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.

**RICHARD**            But I know none, and therefore am no beast.

**ANNE**                O wonderful, when devils tell the truth!

**RICHARD**            More wonderful, when angels are so angry.

(Richard III, 1.2.68-74)



These two characters seem to have a habit of echoing one another's phrasing. This continues throughout the scene and, indeed, this is one of the reasons for looking at this excerpt: the similarities between the lines also serve to highlight their differences. What at first glance seem to be minor variations might lead us to make very different performance choices. What follows is my line-by-line analysis of the exchange. Having presented a plausible, perceivable and playable choice for each line, I then pick out one line – “But I know none and therefore am no beast” – and explore alternative performance choices afforded by the construction. Track 3 of the attached CD provides a vocal demonstration of these possibilities.

w---S   w-----S   w---S   w---S   w-S   (Neutral Line)

// x   x   //   \   /   x   /   x X

[Lady, | you know] no rules of cha~rity,~

w-----S   w-----S   w---S   w---S   w----S   (Neutral Line)

x   /   x   /   x   /   //   x   x   //   (x)

Which ren~ders good for bad, | [blessings for cur~(ses).]

**Bone Structure:** In the first line each metrical position is matched with a single syllable. Unless the examination of other Metrical Factors encourages me to reconsider, I can work on the assumption that, in terms of bone structure, the Natural Line is convergent with the Neutral Line. In the second line there is a divergence. The ten metrical positions of the Neutral Line are matched with eleven syllables in the Natural Line creating a tailed ending.

Joint Articulation: In the first line I find over-articulation at the second metrical position (the first foot joint) and under-articulation at the eighth metrical position (the fourth foot joint):

Lady, | you know no rules of cha~rity,~

At the tenth metrical position I find that the line joint is articulated in that it is matched with a relatively major phrasal boundary, but it is not fully articulated in that the line joint does not coincide with the end of a thought and the Natural Line seems to exert some pressure for continuation. The fact that the final word boundary is marked with a weak syllable boundary might also limit the articulation of the line-ending. The line joint is subject to under-articulation.

In the second line I find under-articulation at the second position (first foot joint) and over-articulation at the sixth position (third foot joint). There is also the issue of under-articulation at the tenth position caused by the tailed ending.

Which ren~ders good for bad, | blessings for cur~(ses)

Muscle Tone: The first line presents divergence in the first two metrical positions, with a strong stress occupying the first and a weak stress occupying the second. This gives way to a 'stress valley', which might be treated as a rhythmical group or

figure. The syllable occupying the fifth metrical position might receive a relatively strong stress compared to other weak positions. The syllable occupying the tenth metrical position is a naturally weak stress and can therefore be regarded as a divergence.

w---S w-----S w---S w---S w-S (Neutral Line)

// x x // \ / x / xX

[Lady, | you know] no rules of cha~rity,~

The second line displays divergence in the seventh and eighth positions in which there is a strong stress followed by a weak stress. There is also an additional weak stress at the tailed ending. This has the potential to create another rhythmical group or figure but the strong shape of the now familiar 'stress valley' is compromised by the inclusion of the tailed ending.

w-----S w-----S w---S w---S w-----S (Neutral Line)

x / x / x / // x x // (x)

Which ren~ders good for bad, | [blessings for cur~(ses).]

Muscle Tissue: In the first line I find long vowels in five of the seven words. Only two of the seven words are closed by a final consonant, of which only one is a major word, "rules", closed by a voiced alveolar fricative, which affords prolongation. Amongst the consonants there is a high proportion of liquids and nasals and there is only one voiceless stop: the /t/ of "charity". This is the only point in the line at which both voice and breath are arrested simultaneously as a

*direct result of the speech sound being articulated. These observations will guide my choices regarding both the articulation and the stress patterning of the line. Overall, the speech sounds lend themselves to stress and articulation achieved by means of duration and pitch contours rather than by ‘explosive’ amplitude and ‘sharp’, clear-cut separations.*

*The second line has a relatively high frequency of short vowels, with the only long vowel occurring in the first syllable of “curses”. I notice that, in contrast to the previous line, the majority of the words – and all five of the major words – are closed by final consonants. Three of these are closed by voiced alveolar fricatives, which afford prolongation, and two by voiced linguolabial stops, which do not naturally afford prolongation. These two words, “good” and “bad” are noteworthy for being the only major words over the two lines to have ‘clean’ – that is to say, unambiguously ‘stopped’ – final boundaries. The marked sibilance within the line generated by the three final voiced fricatives is further highlighted by the voiceless affricate that closes “which” and the voiceless fricatives within “blessings” and “curses”.*

*I have now examined all four of the Metrical Factors. This should have brought all of the relevant perceptual features to my attention. I am therefore ready to begin devising a rhythmical performance in which all of these perceptual features are taken into consideration.*

*w---S   w-----S   w---S   w---S   w-S   (Neutral Line)*

*// x   x   //   \   /   x   /   xX*

*[Lady, | you know] no rules of cha~rity,~*

w-----S    w-----S    w---S    w---S    w----S    (Neutral Line)

x    /    x    /    x    /    //    x    x    //    (x)

*Which ren~ders good for bad, | [blessings for cur~(ses).]*

*I consider that these lines afford a rhythmical performance that embodies Sustained/Flexible/Free movement, with a sensuous Weight that leaves the Working Action in the region of either a relatively Lighting Wringing or a relatively Strong Floating. These qualities are achieved by moving through the lines as follows:*

*The first four positions are treated as a group rather than as a figure; that is, the tension between the Neutral and Natural Line patterns is maintained rather than snapped in the reading of the 'stress valley'. This gives a slow, curving movement to the opening of the line, stretching the speech sounds both to give shape to the rhythmical group and to accommodate the over-articulated joint at the second position. The 'climb' out of the valley continues through the long speech sounds of the third foot. The under-articulation at the eighth position is dealt with by 'curling' around it rather than 'bursting through' and a slight prolongation of the speech sound in the tenth position helps to give articulation to the line-ending whilst also giving the sense of one line flowing into the next.*

*The movement continues through into the second line as the slightly prolonged liquid and nasal consonants ease their way through the under-articulated foot joint at the second position. Over the fourth, fifth and sixth positions, the line finds a higher degree of convergence before reaching the over-articulated joint at the sixth position and the second stress valley of the construction. The potentially swift movement through the curve of the valley is checked by the pronounced sibilance and the strength of the tenth position is softened by the final curl of the tailed ending.*

*This perceivable choice is made playable by linking it to the activity ‘to placate massagingly’. This is a plausible choice within the dramatic context: Richard’s aim, as he informs us in his later soliloquy, is to “woo” and “win” Lady Anne. Given her attitude towards him at this point in the scene, an attempt to placate or soften her with this oily pair of verse lines seems to be a ‘logical and coherent’ tactic.*

*In analysing Anne’s response, I find a number of similarities and a number of important differences in the construction:*

w---S    w-----S    w--S    w---S    w----S    (Neutral Line)

// x    X    //    \ / x / x /

[Villain, | thou know’st] no law of God nor man:

w----S    w----S    w-----S    w-----S    w--S    (Neutral Line)

\    /    \    /    x    /    \    /    x    /    (x)

*No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pit~(y).*

Bones: *The bone structure of these verse lines is identical to that of Richard's lines: a one-to-one correspondence of syllables to metrical positions in the first line (accepting the contraction "know'st" as a single syllable<sup>586</sup>), and a tailed ending to the second line.*

Joints: *Here I see some differences between Richard's lines and Anne's. The first line displays similar over-articulation at the second position (first foot joint) but without the under-articulation of the eighth position (fourth foot joint). There is stronger articulation at the line-joint. There is not the under-articulation of the first foot joint seen in Richard's line, nor the sixth position caesura, nor the potential under-articulation at the eighth position that accompanies the rhythmical group/figure. There is the possibility of an 'unmarked' caesura, and therefore over-articulation, at the fourth position as the phrasing of the Natural Line divides. The most noticeable feature of the two verse lines is the high frequency of monosyllabic words (seventeen out of nineteen, with the only disyllabic words being the first and last of the two line sequence) which means that there are word boundaries (some major, some minor) at eighteen out of twenty joints. This leads me to expect relatively heavy/strong articulation throughout the sequence.*

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<sup>586</sup> In which case "know'st" rhymes with "boast".

Muscle Tone: *The shape of the initial stress valley is distorted if I opt for a degree of emphatic stress on “thou”, which seems to be justified in the context<sup>587</sup>.*

*Nevertheless, there is divergence in the strong stress occupying the first position and the weak stress occupying the second. The third foot contains two strong stresses, as in Richard’s line. Unlike in Richard’s line, however, there is a naturally strong stress occupying the tenth position. In the second line there is a high frequency of strong stress, with the first, third and seventh positions all containing relatively strong speech stresses for the positions they occupy. There is not the divergent rhythmical group occupying the final four positions that I found in Richard’s text.*

Muscle Tissue: *The first thing I notice in contrast to Richard’s text is that in Anne’s first line, four (as opposed to only one) of the major word boundaries are closed by final consonants. In Anne’s second line, perhaps the most noticeable feature is the high level of sibilance and the repetition of the voiceless alveolar stop /t/, which is particularly prominent, and combined with the use of the voiceless bilabial stop /p/, at the end of the line: “touch of pity”. These are three of six voiceless stops within Anne’s two lines, as opposed to only one in the entirety of Richard’s utterance. Comparing the feel of Anne’s lines to Richard’s in the mouth, whilst his lines have a degree of openness, hers are more closed and require much more work at the front of the mouth.*

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<sup>587</sup> This does not mean hitting the personal pronoun over the head with a hammer blow of amplitude. The prominence required to point up “thou” as opposed to “me” might be achieved by a noticeable shift in pitch, for example.



*Discounting for a moment the divergence that opens the first line and the tail that closes the second, such verse might afford Strong/Sustained movement, with the collective over-articulation of the joints held in tension with the Neutral Line, as the one ‘pulls back’ against the forward momentum of the other, and the strong stresses strive to make their presence felt. Within this long stretch of monosyllables there are none of the consecutive weak stresses or under-articulated foot joints that help to create the sense of Flexibility in Richard’s lines. The relatively high level of articulation at the first line joint also affords Direct movement. Rather than curving around the line-ending, I might treat the end of Anne’s first line as either a stop followed by a new movement or as a sharp ‘right-angled’ turn within an ongoing movement. The heavy articulation of the lines combined with the relatively high frequency of stops and potentially ‘harsh’ sibilants, might afford movement that is more Bound than Free. This leads me towards the choice of a Pressing (Strong/Direct/Sustained/Bound) Working Action.*

*What, though, of the stress valley that occupies the first four positions of the first line? The over-articulation at the second position can be made much cleaner and more defined than the equivalent articulation in Richard’s line. This is because of the closing consonant, which has the potential to allow for a hard ‘stop’. The movement through the first two positions may be different as well. The voiced fricative /v/ does lend itself to prolongation but the short vowel that follows it doesn’t. I might achieve a high level of prominence for the divergent pattern by Strong/Quick/Bound movement through the first two positions: the divergent strong stress ‘bursting forward’ and then ‘slamming into’ the over-articulated joint at the second position. I might then think that the divergent tail at the end of the second*

*line also affords a Strong/Quick 'bursting' quality. The word that violates the joint at the tenth position ("pity"), following what I am treating as Strong movement through the line, seems very well suited to highlighting the divergence by 'bursting' through the obtruding joint: the initial plosive leading into a short vowel and then hitting, at the joint itself, a voiceless stop that cannot easily be lingered over but that can act as a sudden release into the final 'extra' syllable. The moment of 'bursting through' the joint can be given additional 'contending' Weight by its consonance with the /t/ of "touch".*

*If I decide to treat the verse lines in this way then what I seem to have is a Pressing Working Action with Strong/Quick movement at its inception and conclusion. This might be thought of as one movement: if the Pressing is like pushing a heavy object then the initial Quickness might be conceived as the moment of throwing one's shoulder against it and the Quick ending as the final shove as contact with the object is broken. There may be a number of other options available but I submit think that this is a perceivable choice. An activity such as 'to repel pushingly' is a playable choice and that such behaviour is plausible for Anne's character, both in terms of her action in the scene ('to make him go away') and as a direct response to the activity I have suggested for Richard: he tries to 'massage' his way through her defences and she throws her Weight into Pressing him away.*

*The next line of the excerpt is Richard's*

*:*

*But I know none, and therefore am no beast*

Bones: Convergence between the patterns.

Joints: Over-articulation at the fourth position (creating a caesura). Under-articulation at the sixth position. High proportion of word boundaries.

Muscle Tone: Relatively strong stresses occupying the third and ninth positions. A relatively weak stress occupying the eighth position.

Muscle Tissue: The most noticeable feature is the alliteration of /n/ sounds: “know”, “none”, “no”.

The first question here is what to do with the four positions occupied by the first hemistich. There is the potential to treat this as a group with an upward ‘slope’ of stress:

x \ / //

[But I know none]

Or as a more convergent alternation of stresses:

x / X /

But I know none

*Or as a more divergent figure, foregrounding consecutive stresses supported by alliteration:*

*x x // //*  
*[But I know none]*

*The last of these could be modified to give a slight stress to the second syllable, just enough to point up that the “I” is opposed to the “beast” mentioned by Anne. What attracts me to this option is the change of tempi, both in relation to my reading of Richard’s previous activity and in response to the lines from Anne. The ‘slope’ option seems to be leading towards another Sustained choice. The more convergent option is possible but doesn’t seem to be making the most of the affordances presented by the construction. This rhythmical figure seems to offer an opportunity to introduce variation, with a Quick movement through the first two positions and two sharp stresses in the third and fourth.*

*There is another opportunity for this kind of ‘double jab’ movement in the ninth and tenth positions of the line. The final foot is even preceded by two relatively weak stresses, which might suggest that the same figure could be repeated. However, to articulate the figure at the sixth position would mean severing “there” from “fore”, which puts me in danger of destroying the Natural Line altogether. If I want the two strong stresses to stand out, I might be better to treat the foot they occupy*

as a mini group in its own right, thus creating a three-group internal structure for the gestalt:

x X // // x / x ? // //

[But I know none] [and there~fore am] [no beast]

*I have left a question mark over the seventh position because I now have a decision to make about how to shape the middle group. If I treat “am” as a weak stress, the group to which it belongs takes on a divergent shape. If, however, I ‘tilt’ the reading so that the syllable in the seventh position receives a higher degree of stress, this creates a more convergent stress pattern in middle portion of the line. If this slight stress is achieved by deceleration, this will also help to articulate the joint at the eighth position. The under-articulation at the sixth position might be dealt with by a slight stretching of “there” and a Flexible pitch contour guiding me through the joint. This can be done with a degree of ease given that the authority of the foot joint is somewhat undermined by the three group structure anyway.*

w---S w-----S w-----S w----S w----S (Neutral Line)

x X // // x / x X // //

[But I know none] [and there~fore am] [no beast]



*Given as a rhythmical performance this perceivable choice involves a gestalt subdivided into three groups: a first that is dominated by two Quick jabs, a second that seems more Sustained/Flexible, and a third made up of two more jabs. This can be understood and experienced as a series of Quick/Direct Dabs (or possibly*

*fairly Light Punches) separated by a Sustained/Flexible recovery: float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, perhaps.*

*How might this become a plausible and playable choice? In terms of the logic and coherence of the scene, Richard's previous tactic has been poorly received and elicited a less than favourable response from the object of his 'affections'.*

*Changing tack, therefore, seems like a logical thing for Richard to do. The activity might be 'to tease' with the Dabbing Working Action, along with its evasive recovery, personalised as the kind of 'jabbing' or 'poking'. 'To tease pokingly': a playable choice that seems plausible within the given circumstances.*

*What follows is an exchange in which, once again, the characters' lines seem to echo one another whilst displaying a number of important differences.*

ANNE                      O wonderful, when devils tell the truth!

RICHARD                More wonderful, when angels are so angry.

Bones: Anne's line is convergent. Richard's line has a tailed ending.

Joints: Both lines have under-articulation at the second position and over-articulation at the fourth. Both have under-articulation at the sixth position.

Richard's line has the additional under-articulation caused by the tailed ending.

Muscle Tone: Both lines have strong stresses occupying the first position and relatively weak stresses occupying the fourth. The opening four positions of each line might be turned into a rhythmical group or figure to deal with the divergent pattern. Richard's line has a relatively weak stress in the eighth position ("are") and a relatively strong stress in the ninth position ("so").

Muscle Tissue: The most noticeable feature is that Anne's line contains strong alliteration in the second hemistich: two major words opening with /t/. The major word that precedes them opens with the voiced equivalent /d/ and, as both sounds involve the same movements of the articulators, the pattern may be experienced as a sequence of three. This might modify my assessment of the muscle tone to give additional stress to "devils", "tell" and "truth". Richard's line has a run of similar, though not identical sounds in "angels", "are" and "angry". These may also invite added stress, though given the different natures of the sounds that are being highlighted in each line, the ways in which the stresses are achieved are likely to be very different as well.

The first question is how to deal with the syllables occupying the first four positions of Anne's line.

*One option is to treat them as a sharply articulated, divergent figure with two strong stresses followed by two weak stresses. The under-articulated foot joint within the figure might be experienced as a ‘snapping point’: two extended strong syllables suddenly giving way to two quick weak stresses, ‘cascading’ through the foot joint in the process. Something of a Slashing movement, perhaps.*

// // x x  
[O won~derful]

*Alternatively, I might slow the movement through the second foot by ‘tilting’ the stress pattern to give some prominence to “ful”, perhaps by way of prolongation of the speech sound and a slight increase in amplitude, which will also help to over-articulate the second foot joint without the sharp separation required by the figure. This creates a less divergent group, held in tension (rather than ‘snapping’ the tension) with the Neutral Line. The under-articulation at the second position might be marked by deceleration and a ‘curving’ pitch contour. The Slash becomes more of a Wring.*

/ // x \  
[O won~derful]

*I am going to prefer this second option because I believe it pairs well with what is to follow. The second hemistich of Anne’s line involves very strong stresses on the three major words, all with plosive word onsets.*



*This lends itself to Strong/Quick movement. This can be taken further if “devils” is treated as ‘bursting through’ the third foot joint. What this gives me is a first hemistich that ‘winds up’ the tension between the patterns as a Wring, and a second hemistich that explodes forwards as a series of Strong, Quick Punches.*

*w---S    w---S    w----S    w----S    w----S    (Neutral Line)*

*/   //   x   \        x   //   x   //   x   //*

*[O won~derful], | when de~vils tell the truth!*

*This could be understood as two movements/activities, with one acting as a preparation for the other. ‘To mock twistingly’ and then ‘to deride pulverisingly’. These are playable choices. They are also plausible within the dramatic context. These activities counteract Richard’s attempts to win Anne’s favour and can be understood as being enacted in the pursuit of her scenic action. If she can beat him down with these activities then she is a step closer to getting rid of him.*

*If Anne Wrings at Richard, then maybe he Wrings right back at her. The first four positions of Richard’s line afford exaggerated mimicry of Anne’s own line. In the second hemistich, however, he does not seem to match her series of Punches. Rather, the construction affords a Lighter, more Sustained and Flexible, Floating ‘stroke’. Rather than ‘bursting through’ the joint at the sixth position, “angels” might stretch and curve its way through it, the slight weakening of stress on “are” and the slight increase of stress on “so” might be used to soften and slow the forward momentum of the line, and a yielding curve through the tailed ending finishes the job. On this basis, Richard might be seen as matching Anne’s ‘mock’ with a ‘mock’*

*of his own and then, having set up the expectation of matching Anne's line throughout, he can follow the 'pulling back' of the caesura by easing into an activity such as 'to disarm strokingly'.*

w-----S    w---S    w-----S    w----S    w---S            (Neutral Line)

//    //    x \        x    /    x    X    X    /    (x)

*[More won~derful], | when an~gels are so an~(gry)*

In the foregoing analysis I noted several instances in which alternative readings of the verse construction might lead to different performance choices. I chose not to pursue those possibilities in my interpretation of the passage. This is perfectly legitimate within the context of the Verse Psychology Game: it is not incumbent on the player to have explored every conceivable possibility in depth before making a choice and, indeed, given that each and every line of dramatic verse might afford numerous performance choices, to impose such a restriction on oneself might render the game almost unplayable. However, for the purposes of illustration, I will explore some alternative readings of Richard's line:

But I know none and therefore am no beast.

To this line I ascribed the activity 'to tease pokingly'. My analysis supports the assertion that this constitutes a plausible, perceivable and playable choice. However, before making this choice I suggested that the line might be stressed in


different ways. The syllables occupying the first four metrical positions could be treated like this:

x \   /   //

But I know none

This 'stress slope' might give rise to the experience, not of a Dabbing movement, but of something more Sustained. The steady progression in the levels of stress – with the muscle tone of each foot still converging with the weak-strong pattern of the Neutral Line – can be realised as a Direct movement. This puts us in the territory of either Gliding or Pressing. The slight over-articulation of the foot joint at the fourth position (arising from the phrasal boundary) might be used to slow the overall movement of the line, adding to the sense of a Sustained activity. There is the potential for a similar stress slope in the final portion of the line:

x \   /   //      x   /      x \   /   //

But I know none | and there~fore am no beast 

The movement through the last four metrical positions can echo that of the first four. If the movement through the under-articulated joint at the sixth position is realised through deceleration then this contributes to the Sustained quality. The 'reset' to a lower level of stress after the fourth position and the repeated pattern of the 'stress slope' might lead me to perform the line, not as one continuous Sustained movement but as two iterations of a Sustained movement with the slight variation offered by the movement through the under-articulated joint at the sixth

position operating as a recovery between the two. If the movement is regarded as somewhere between a pair of Glides and a pair of Presses (the former Strengthening towards the latter and then starting as a Lighter movement again at the recovery) then this could be experienced as pulling, gently but firmly, on a rope. In terms of playability, the activity might be ‘to coerce pullingly’.

Another possibility might be to use the monosyllables of the first portion of the line to create, not a Sustained movement, but a series of Strong/Quick ones:

x / \ //

But I know none

There is the potential here for ‘jabbing’ (Punching) the verse at Anne: ‘to berate jabbingly’. The slight over-articulation at the fourth position offers an opportunity to change tack. Deceleration through the under-articulated joint at the sixth position can be used to create a more Sustained quality leading into a relatively gentle stress slope in the final portion of the line.

x / \ // x / x X \ /

But I know none | and there~fore am no beast 

The second hemistich becomes a Gliding movement which could be used to counteract the violence of the first activity. ‘To berate jabbingly’ followed by ‘to soothe strokingly’. These are playable activities and the sequence is plausible if

we imagine that in 'jabbing' Richard reacts intuitively to Anne's insult and then checks himself, shifting into a more conciliatory mode of action.

A fourth possibility for the line is to treat it as one continuous Gliding movement. This can be achieved by 'tilting' the performance in the direction of the Neutral Line pattern; that is, by adopting a convergent delivery style. The divergences within the construction are fairly mild and so the resistance to such a performance will be minimal.

x / X / x / x / X /

But I know none | and there~fore am no beast 

The tension generated by such a performance may just be enough to create a degree of Bound Flow. For me, the image that comes to mind is that of getting a naughty child to stop screaming in my face by placing my hands on his upper arms and guiding him, very gently, to take a step back. The activity might be 'to calm guidingly'.

I do not suggest that these examples exhaust the possibilities even for this rather 'simple' line of dramatic verse. They merely serve to illustrate that, for the player of the Verse Psychology Game, it is always a question of making informed decisions rather than attempting to find 'correct interpretations'. The only constraints on the player's creative freedom are the constitutive rules of the game and his or her own levels of rhythmic competence.

In this chapter I have demonstrated the potential for the Anatomical Approach and the principles of the Verse Psychology Game to play an integral role in the analysis and interpretation of metrical dramatic verse. This approach leads to plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices. It builds on Barton's aim of 'marrying the two traditions', surpasses the 'vague and woolly' approaches to 'actioning' verse texts described by Gaskill, and gives the verse a dramatic function that is not only active but hyperactive.

## Chapter 6: Gaming the Play

In this chapter, I present a series of exercises and techniques for composing metrical dramatic verse in accordance with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game. I have developed and carried out these exercises in order to further my own creative development as a playwright. However, I suggest that these exercises might be used as pedagogical tools for developing the skills of other writers. I therefore propose the techniques outlined in this chapter as the basis of a potential training course for 'sensitising' playwrights to the performative, hyperactive possibilities of dramatic verse. Such a course might form part of a wider programme in dramatic writing.

### 6.1 Re-Verse Psychology

The Motion in Poetry Metaphor and the Verse Psychology Game provide a framework within which the rhythms of metrical dramatic verse can be understood and experienced as purposeful movements of the human body and therefore as embodying psychophysical dramatic action. What does this mean for my creative process as a contemporary verse dramatist? It means that it should be possible to compose, develop and evaluate metrical dramatic verse on the basis of its performative potential; that is, on the basis of its capacity to embody psychophysical dramatic action.

The very structure of the Verse Psychology Game might, however, present the playwright with a problem or, rather, with the apparent lack of a problem. If I, as a

verse dramatist, assume that any script I happen to write will (or, at least, could) be interpreted and performed by a group of highly-skilled players of the Verse Psychology Game, then can't I rely on them to do my job for me? In other words, doesn't the Verse Psychology Game simply shift the responsibility for making verse active from the playwright to the actor? The obvious objection to this is that, whilst it is up to the actor to make plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices, the playwright has a responsibility, as the 'gamewright', to create verse which affords such choices. This raises another question: is there good reason to suppose that any line of iambic pentameter is unplayable in principle? Within the framework that I have described, the answer appears to be no.

Tsur's theory of cognitive poetics relies on the principle that a line of metrical verse is considered metrical by virtue of the fact that a rhythmically competent performer can treat it as such (by producing a rhythmical performance of the line). This means that any line of iambic pentameter, by definition, affords rhythmical performance. The Motion in Poetry Metaphor suggests that any rhythmical performance of a line of iambic pentameter has the potential to be understood and experienced as a purposeful movement of the human body. Laban's system of Motion Factors and Working Actions, as applied in the *Laban-Malmgren System*, suggests that any purposeful movement of the human body has the potential to be used as the experiential metaphor for a dramatic activity. This leads to the conclusion that any line of iambic pentameter could, if placed in an appropriate dramatic context, be used in the embodiment of some form of psychophysical dramatic action.



The fact that no line of iambic pentameter is 'unplayable in principle' does not, however, prevent me from making positive choices about the construction of my own dramatic verse or from using the principles of the Verse Psychology Game in order to discern between one construction and another. Nor does it prevent me from making informed judgements about the appropriateness of a particular construction within a coherent, ongoing sequence of dramatic activities. As a playwright, I can ensure that lines are playable by identifying and selecting a plausible, perceivable and playable choices of my own.

I have argued throughout this thesis that, from an actor's perspective, authorial intention is irrelevant to an assessment of the rhythmical affordances presented by a line of dramatic verse. I still maintain that this is the case. If new evidence came to light tomorrow that the script for *Hamlet* had, in fact, been produced as the result of an infinite number of monkeys bashing away at an infinite number of typewriters then the line, "Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!" would continue to have the same rhythmical affordances as it had yesterday. Nevertheless, if I had written that line, I could use the principles of the Verse Psychology Game to make meaningful judgements about its performative potential and its place within a 'logical and coherent' sequence of dramatic action. Enabling such a process is part of the original contribution that this thesis makes to the practice of the contemporary verse dramatist.

By playing the Verse Psychology Game with my own text – that is, by making my own performance choices and assessing them in relation to the rhythmical affordances of the lines – I am able to make an informed judgement as to whether

the verse has the potential to embody a specific sequence of dramatic action and, within the limits of my own rhythmic competence as a writer, modify the affordances of the line to better suit my choices. Moreover, the legitimacy of my assessment of the verse is not dependent on a particular actor making the choices in performance I will have made in the act of composition. From a gamewright's perspective, the fact that there may be multiple routes through the maze does not invalidate the game, but solving the puzzle oneself is the best way of knowing that there is indeed a route to its heart.

In its simplest form, then, the task of the playwright-as-gamewright is to play the Verse Psychology Game backwards: to start with a sequence of plausible and playable choices of dramatic activity and then to create lines or sequences of lines in which such choices can be regarded as perceivable affordances. In practice, the task of composing active verse lines will not be so linear. The writing process is iterative, involving intuitive phases as well as those of considered decision-making and analysis; it is perfectly possible within the framework that I have presented for the playwright's choices to 'emerge' rather than having to be planned out in advance.

The questions for the dramatist now become more practical: it is all very well to intend to write verse lines that afford specific dramatic activities but how might I actually do it? My ability to fulfil the role of the playwright-as-gamewright is dependent on my own levels of rhythmic and lusory competence and also on my level of 'sensitivity' to the experiential nature of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor. How, then, might I go about becoming more competent and more 'sensitive'?

I have found that ‘technical’ exercises are a simple, quick and easy way of testing and challenging my ability to compose verse in accordance with the principles of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor. In the following example, I set myself the task of composing a Slashing line. The account below is based on notes taken at the time of carrying out the exercise. Track 4 of the digital appendix provides vocal demonstrations of the lines composed in the exercise.

*In the first instance, I can try to either imagine or enact a simple Slashing movement and write intuitively on the basis of that psychophysical sensation:*

*I'll slap you with the Slashing of this line!*

*Not exactly profound, but it gives me something to work with. In the moment of composition, this line felt like a Slashing movement. Is there anything in the perceptual features of the line to support my intuition that it affords a Slashing rhythmical performance? Applying the analytical tools of the Anatomical Approach will help to answer that question:*

x // x X x // x X x /

*I'll slap you with the Slash~ing of this line!*



*The bone structure is convergent. In terms of joint articulation, the most notable feature is the under-articulated joint at the sixth position (with “Slashing” violating the third foot joint of the Neutral Line). The muscle tone is notable for the fact that there are naturally weak stresses in the fourth and eighth positions. In the notation above, I have marked these as X stresses but there are choices to make: ‘tilt’ the speech stresses in the direction of convergence or emphasise the divergence, creating ‘long stress valleys’ between the more prominent syllables. Looking at the muscle tissue, there is alliteration between the syllables occupying the second and sixth positions, both of which are strong, and this may encourage me (as the actor) to give an even higher level of stress to those syllables. It is also worth noting that all of the strong metrical positions except the tenth are occupied by syllables involving short vowel sounds. A Strong/Quick/Flexible movement is afforded by the potential to give exceptionally strong stress to the alliterative syllables, ‘sweep’ through the weak stresses of the ‘curved’ stress valleys and ‘burst through’ the foot joint at the sixth position. As a next step in the exercise I might try to modify the Slashing quality of the line. What features might I add or change? An ‘extra’ syllable somewhere:*

*I’m slapp~(ing you) with the slash~ing of this line!*



*The disyllabic occupancy of the third metrical position might be used to speed up the movement from “slapping” to “Slashing”, with “-ing” and “you” compressed in*

*their duration in order to be experienced as occupying a single weak position. The under-articulation at the second position might be used as another opportunity to ‘burst through’ a foot joint, which, again, might encourage a Strong/Quick/Flexible movement.*

*If additional weak stresses and under-articulated joints seem to move the line in the right direction, then perhaps a tailed ending might be worth trying as well:*

*I’m slapp~(ing you) with the Slash~ing of this verse~ (line)* 

*Alternatively, I can start again and try to create a new Slashing line:*

*This line will move as a torrent of verse*

*This construction contains a ‘stress maximum in a weak position’:*

*x   /   x   /   x x //   x x //*

*This line will move as a [torrent of verse]* 

*In order to maintain the gestalt of the verse line a rhythmical performance may involve the final four positions being sharply articulated as a divergent rhythmical*

*figure. This invites Strong/Quick/Flexible movement through the stress valley. The tension between the Neutral and Natural patterns is ‘snapped’ and the figure is ‘foregrounded’, but with a Sustained ‘preparation’ through the more convergent opening portion of the line. This ‘preparation’ must operate as the ‘background’ against which the figure is to stand out. A Slash, perhaps, but one that feels quite different to those of the previous constructions.*

*Can I keep the stress valley in the final four positions but modify the affordances of the earlier portion of the line?*

// x x // x / // x x //

*[Slashing the curves] of harsh, | [deviant lines]*



*I now have stress valleys opening and closing the line, with a convergent foot between them, creating consecutive stresses in the sixth and seventh positions (rather than the seventh position ‘stress maximum’). Such a construction might be performed as two Strong Slashes separated by a more Sustained moment of ‘recovery’. If these lines have the potential to be Slashes then can I create a line that wouldn’t be a Slash?*

*This harsh, Slashed line enshrines curved forms in verse*



*The line displays convergent bone structure, strong articulation throughout and slight over-articulation at the second position, strings of consecutive strong stresses, lots of long vowels (including in all of the strong positions), a difficult-to-articulate cluster of sibilant fricatives and prominent assonance in consecutive positions. In creating a rhythmical performance, I experience very Sustained movement. This is not a line that readily affords a Quick/Flexible quality. It does afford a Pressing (Strong/Direct/Sustained) quality.*

As there is no dramatic context for them, none of these constructions can be said to embody a specific dramatic activity. Nevertheless, by indulging in such explorations of ‘movement for movement’s sake’, I exercise both my intellectual and my experiential understanding of verse rhythm. I also challenge myself to use constructions that might not fall within my intuitive repertoire. The purpose is not to compile a selection of ‘off the peg’ Slashing movements but to build up my compositional muscles so that, when I am focused on trying to create a particular dramatic activity (linked to a more specific quality of movement), I might have a higher level of technical skill and a wider range of embodied experience to draw upon.

How else might I seek to hone my abilities as a gamewright? Applying the principles of the Verse Psychology Game to texts such as Shakespeare’s, as I have done in the previous chapter, has the potential to train and expand the lusory capacity of the playwright-as-gamewright. I therefore consider the embodied process of analysing such texts an integral part of my own creative development as a writer. In other words, a good way of learning about creating texts that afford

plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices is to go through the process of making such choices based on a text that already exists. Moreover, such analysis allows me the opportunity to learn by emulation. I do not suggest that the best way to write dramatic verse is simply to mimic Shakespeare. However, having used the principles of the Verse Psychology Game to assess the performative potential of a line or sequence of lines, I have found it a useful exercise to try to create a similar construction myself. Earlier, I offered an analysis of this line from Shakespeare's *Richard II*:

Stay, the king hath thrown his warder down.

I concluded that the line afforded a Punch followed by a Press. Having had the embodied experience of those movements, I can try to create a similar construction on the basis of those sensations:

*Stop, this line must curb its forward march.*

Similarly, having created my own rhythmical performance of Juliet's "Gallop apace", I can try to recreate its movements in a construction such as:

*Borrow a line of heaven-hurried verse*

*In rhythmic homage. These affordances*

*Of William's are built into the beat*



*That drives the action on triumphantly.*

*Craft your own verses, plagiaristic tyke,*

*The metrical gods aren't blind, and poetry*

*Spits in the eyes of ne'er-do-wells and cheats.*

This is not done in order to 'import' such constructions into my own writing at a later date, but in order to give myself an embodied experience of 'creating' such lines on the basis of the psychophysical sensations that they generate. For the purposes of the exercise, the content of my version is not important: it just needs to make enough sense to give an organisational structure to the Natural Line. If I struggle to imitate the construction, then this alerts me to the fact that, even if such lines are within my rhythmic competence as a performer, they are not yet within my rhythmic competence as a writer. Whilst my own lines can, once more, only be regarded as movement for movement's sake, it is vital to the exercise that the lines being mimicked are first explored in terms of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor – that is, as purposeful movements of the human body – and that the new bits of text are generated on the basis of those movements. The task for which I am training myself for is not the mindless imitation of an author, but the embodied imitation of an action.

A more sophisticated exercise turns the imitation game described above on its head. Here, I find a pre-existing dramatic context that is suitable for verse but in which I have no preconceptions regarding the specific constructions of that verse. I don't read or speak Greek and so, in taking a character and a situation from a

Greek play, I can have a good grasp of the dramatic context without having the rhythmic particularities of someone else's verse running around in my mind. A quick glance at a prose translation will more than suffice for the purposes of the exercise. The idea is to experiment with verse attached to a specific choice of activity, without the immediate pressures of devising the content of the speech or the context in which it is spoken.

The starting point for the exercise is to select an appropriate scene, such as the scene between Medea and Jason in Euripides' *Medea* (Lines 446-627)<sup>588</sup>, and then a particular moment, such as the opening of Medea's first speech in that scene. From there I can make a choice of dramatic activity that seems plausible and playable within the dramatic context and in relation to the gist of what is being said at that moment. In the instance of Medea's speech, I suggest that the activity 'to shame' Jason is plausible and playable. There are lots of ways in which one might play the activity 'to shame'. The aim of the exercise is to produce three different variations: to come up with three different Working Actions that could be used as experiential metaphors for the activity 'to shame' and then write three different versions of the opening lines of the speech based on the psychophysical sensations that the Working Actions produce.

The following account is of my own attempt at this exercise:

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<sup>588</sup> Euripides, *Medea and Other Plays*, Translated by James Morwood, (Oxford University Press, 1997).

*In this exercise I will try to create three variations on Medea's activity 'to shame': a Slashing (Strong/Flexible/Quick) version, a Pressing (Strong/Direct/Sustained) version and a Floating (Light/Flexible/Sustained) version. For the Slashing version of 'to shame' I personalise the Working Action as 'smacking someone with a heavy cushion'. So my first version is intended to embody 'to shame smackingly'. For the Pressing Working Action I imagine holding a door shut as someone strains to come through it from the other side: 'to shame barringly'. For the Floating Working Action: running my hand through someone's hair whilst curling it around my fingers: 'to shame curlingly'. The aim is to compose on the basis of how I experience the psychophysical sensation of each Working Action rather than by deciding in advance which perceptual features I think will afford such a movement. I generate such sensations by imagining or enacting (that is to say, miming) each Working Action before attempting the relevant version.*

*Slashing version:*

*Vilest of men! – Not man! – Unmanly cowardice*

*Mars every virtue proper to a man*

*Making you much more woman than myself!*

*Pressing version:*

*Vile man – not man – a man is worth contempt.*

*No word is base, foul, cruel enough to name*

*This thing or beast my mind once thought a man.*

*Floating version:*

*Oh vile man, words fail and the names*

*Reserved for evil, seared on women's lips*

*For use on such occasions, freeze my mouth.*

*Having decided that these lines 'feel right' I can now analyse them using the Anatomical Approach to judge whether the movements I attribute to them can be considered perceivable performance choices.*

*// x x // \ / x / x / (x x)*

*[Vilest of men!] | – Not man! – | Unman~ly cow~(ardice)~*

*/ / x / x / x x x /*

*Mars ev~ery vir~tue [pro~per to a man],*

*// x x // / / x X x /*

*[Making you much] more [wo~man than myself!]*

*In terms of bone structure, the notable feature is the ‘double tail’ at the end of the first line, with the potential for Quick, Flexible movement through the line-ending. In terms of joint articulation, we find that the majority of foot joints are either under-articulated or ‘usurped’ by the creation of rhythmical groups and figures. The muscle tone shows consecutive strong and weak stresses in every line, creating the potential for Strong ‘high peaks’ and Quick, Flexible ‘sweeps’ through the strings of weak syllables. The repetition of the /m/ sound is the most noticeable feature of the muscle tissue which might be emphasised as part of the irregularly-timed pounding or, indeed, smacking of the line’s movement. The construction affords a Slashing movement and I conclude that ‘to shame smackingly’<sup>589</sup> is a plausible, perceivable and playable choice.*

\ / \ / x / x / x /

*Vile man | – not man – | a man is worth contempt.*

\ / x / / / x / x /

*No word is base, foul, cruel enough to name*

x / x / x / \ / x /

*This thing or beast my mind once thought a man*

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<sup>589</sup> To say that my personalised ‘smacking someone with a cushion’ choice is perceivable is to say that a Slashing quality of that sort is a perceivable affordance of the construction. Even someone whose rhythmical performance of the construction was a carbon copy of mine would still personalise the experience of the movement in their own way.

*These lines still have lots of strong stresses, but all the consecutive weak stresses have gone. There are no under-articulated foot joints, the Natural Line continues through the second verse line into the third, yet doesn't jeopardise the integrity of the line-ending. It can therefore be used as part of a Sustained movement through the construction rather than introducing Flexibility. The gestalt is rigidly reinforced throughout, but with tension generated by the Strong/Sustained stresses 'holding back' the forward momentum of the Neutral Line. 'To shame barringly' is a plausible, perceivable and playable choice.*

*The third construction has a different set of features again:*

\ / x / \ / x X x /

*Oh vi~le man, | words fa~il and the names~*

x / x / x / x / x /

*Reserved for e~vil, | seared on wo~men's lips~*

x / x / x / x / X /

*For use on such occa~sions, | freeze my mouth*

*The bone structure has divergences, which in my notation have been brought back to convergence by having "vile" and "fail" occupy two metrical positions each. This repeated feature creates under-articulation at the second and sixth positions with*

*the diphthongs stretching and curving through the joints, encouraging Sustained/Flexible movement through the line.*

*The under-articulated line endings combined with the varied placement of mid-line caesurae (creating over-articulation at the fourth, fifth and seventh positions respectively) might be used to add to the sense of Flexibility, as the phrasing of the Natural Line ‘softens’ and ‘twists’ the Neutral Line pattern. The gestalt of the verse line is maintained if there is deceleration at the line-endings, giving a degree of articulation to the joint even as the Natural Line pattern continues through it. This further adds to the Sustained tempo of the movement. In the muscle tone, there are a number of consecutive strong stresses, but if prominence is achieved by increased duration and pitch contours rather than amplitude – a choice encouraged by the stretching of “vile” and “fail” and by the muscle tissue of the line – then this adds to the Sustained Flexibility and the movement remains Light. The Light/Sustained movement can be supported by the high frequencies of long vowel sounds and liquid consonants. On this basis, ‘to shame curlingly’ is a plausible, perceivable and playable choice for the construction.*

Creating different variations on what is, broadly speaking, the same dramatic moment helps to demonstrate – and, as an exercise, forces the writer to focus on – the *active role* of the verse rhythm in shaping, supporting and embodying the action of the scene.

Useful as these exercises might be as training tools for the writer, they are only exercises. The next step is to examine the use of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor and the Verse Psychology Game within the process of creating a new work of verse drama.

## 6.2 The Lady of the Lake

In this section I examine two short passages taken from my play *The Lady of the Lake*, and offer an account of the writing process that went into their composition. My work on this script constituted the first attempts to apply the principles of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor and the Verse Psychology Game to the creation of a new verse play for the professional theatre. The piece was produced at Theatre by the Lake in Cumbria in 2015, and is a 'reimagining' of stories drawn from Arthurian legend, set in the area local to the theatre. In the previous section, I offered an account of exercises in which a writer might engage as preparation for working on original material. In terms of my own development as a writer, this process has been reversed: the exercises have been developed as a result of and in response to my experiences of working on this script.

One of the challenges of applying the principles of this thesis to the creation of a new verse play is that, within that process, the construction of each verse line is not the only consideration for the playwright. One could, in theory, delay writing any verse until one had developed a 'beat by beat' plan for every activity that every character would play (complete with a set of pre-planned, personalised Working Actions) and then, and only then, start writing verse to embody those



activities. In practice, writing and revising the verse must be incorporated into a larger and more complex iterative 'spiral'; becoming, not simply a matter of executing decisions that have already been made, but an integral part of the decision-making process. The first account of my work on the script seeks to reflect this.

### Morgan and Nimue

The passage I look at in this section is the opening of Act 1 Scene 3<sup>590</sup>. The dialogue is between best friends Morgan and Nimue, two young women who have grown up in Avalon (here imagined as the area surrounding Derwentwater in the Lake District) under the care of Argante, who, as the Lady of the Lake, is the high priestess of the 'old religion'. The nearby city of Carlisle is home to a now rather weather-worn King Arthur and the hotbed of the new Christian faith that presents an existential threat to Argante's way of life. In the first scene of the play the girls have had a confrontation with Argante. They got into trouble for going to Carlisle without permission in order to witness the arrival of Taliesin, a famous poet and storyteller. The women of Avalon have been preparing for the Beltane festival, at which Nimue has long been expected to take on the role of the May Queen. As a result of the earlier argument, however, Argante has cast doubt on whether she will select Nimue for the part:

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<sup>590</sup> For extended excerpts from the scenes discussed in this chapter, see Appendix I.

**NIMUE** Tell me why she hates me!

**MORGAN** Sweet, she doesn't.

She loves you, as I love you, as the world

Will love you when it sees you in your role:

The May Queen, Bride of Beltane: Nimue!

**NIMUE** Perhaps I'm not as special as you think.

Perhaps I'm stupid.

**MORGAN** And what would that make me?

A dunce? A clod?

**NIMUE** I'm ugly!

**MORGAN** Then I'm blind.

In sitting down to begin writing this scene I had given consideration to the previous and immediate circumstances. I had in mind, for example, that:

- The tension between Nimue and Argante has been brewing for some time.
- Nimue is a brilliant scholar and has a close relationship with her tutor, Merlin. This adds to the tension with Argante because she and Merlin used to be lovers but have long since been at enmity.
- Nimue is desperate to be named the May Queen for the upcoming Beltane festival and is worried that Argante will deny her this honour out of spite.

- Nimue wants to be a legend: to have songs written about her so that her name will be remembered forever.
- Morgan has no interest in fame and fortune for herself but loves Nimue and wants her to succeed.
- Morgan is worried that Nimue might grow out of their friendship and leave her behind.
- Morgan and Nimue both believe that Morgan has magical powers but they have kept this a secret from Argante.
- Both of the girls have been excited by the arrival of Taliesin: Nimue because he is just the sort of person she needs to write songs about her; Morgan because she loves hearing him sing and has developed something of a crush on him.
- Taliesin has given Morgan a piece of parchment with strange writing on it that she is unable to read. She is yet to share this with Nimue.

I had a good idea about how the scene might fit into the overall structure of the play. I was also aware of key events that I thought needed to happen in the scene. I had not planned out the actions and activities of the characters. On that basis, I began to write. The following account, based on notes taken at the time of composition, documents that process:

<i>NIMUE</i>	<i>She hates me!</i>
<i>MORGAN</i>	<i>No she doesn't, Nimue.</i>
	<i>She loves you, as I love you –</i>
<i>NIMUE</i>	<i>Does she fuck!</i>

*I have a general sense of the 'energy' with which the characters are entering the scene. Nimue is upset and angry and Morgan is trying to comfort her. That's fine, as far as it goes, but Nimue's feelings are not active in themselves and whilst comforting someone is playable, it seems a bit wishy-washy. To start making more specific, active choices as the playwright – and marrying those choices to metrical considerations – I need to start asking the same questions an actor might ask. Imagining myself to be (playing) Nimue, I can ask questions such as, "What do I want? Why do I want it? What am I doing to try and get it?"*

*Perhaps when Nimue comes into the scene she wants reassurance from Morgan. Possible. Plausible. Reassurance that what? That Argante does love her? I find that unconvincing. Perhaps, deep down, Nimue does want to know that Argante loves her but that kind of reassurance doesn't seem to be what she's after here. Reassurance that Argante will choose her as the May Queen? Possible. But Morgan doesn't know that any more than she does. Reassurance that Morgan loves her? She knows that Morgan loves her. If that's what she's after then it's really just about getting Morgan to massage her ego; to make her feel better. I can imagine that, within the dynamics of their relationship, Morgan plays that role quite often. However, I think that Nimue is after something a little more than that. Battle lines are being drawn between Nimue and Argante. Her desire to be chosen May Queen is the only reason that Nimue is still putting up with Argante at all. She wants to know that Morgan is on her side; that, when it comes to it, Morgan will pick her over Argante. Why? Because Nimue knows that in order to pursue her ambitions she will need to break free from the 'family unit' headed by Argante. This is likely to be messy and she doesn't want to lose Morgan in the process.*

*This presents a problem for Morgan because she doesn't want Nimue to split from Argante in the first place. She wants Nimue to be happy but her concern is that, whatever Nimue might say now, if she does end up 'moving out of home' then she will forget about Morgan and their friendship will die. She, then, wants to give Nimue the reassurance that she needs but without fuelling her animosity towards Argante. This leads to the conclusion that Morgan and Nimue both want the same thing: assurance that, whatever else happens, their friendship is not in jeopardy. This, in fact, is what the whole scene is about. Morgan and Nimue have grown up together but are now on the cusp of adulthood. As a result, their relationship is threatened by a number of different factors: the need to break free from the family unit (seen in Nimue's rift with Argante), the possibility of forming sexual/romantic relationships that may take precedence over their friendship (seen in Morgan's feelings for Taliesin), the need to pursue their individual 'destinies' (seen in Nimue's ambition and Morgan's discovery of her 'magical powers'). The Beltane festival itself, of course, is a symbol of this transition from childhood into adulthood. The desire to overcome these threats to their relationship is what leads to the main 'event' in the scene, which is their decision to bind themselves to one another as 'blood sisters'.*

*The question now is, how does any of this relate back to the opening verse lines of the scene and the activities that drive the action? In the first, 'improvised' draft, Nimue opens the scene with a statement given as a three-position portion of the verse line. The odd number of positions and weak-strong-weak pattern of the utterance has the potential to subvert the internal structure of the verse line gestalt and invite a Quick/Flexible, 'up and down' movement: a Flick or a Slash. To what*



*not expecting it, forcing them to respond. This construction doesn't seem to capture that.*

*If the aim is to apply pressure, a shared line provides that opportunity in the form of metrical requiredness. This line, breaking at the fifth position, generates a relatively low level of requiredness. The fact that the dislocation occurs mid-foot has the potential to up the prosodic ante, but, in this instance, that pressure is alleviated by the fact that the organisational 'authority' of the foot joints has been undermined by the preceding stress valley, and the gestalt of the verse line can be maintained quite easily by treating the two more or less evenly-weighted hemistichs as larger perceptual subunits. In other words, Morgan doesn't need to fix the third foot in order to maintain the gestalt of the line. This leaves Nimue's hemistich feeling ineffectual and petulant. Morgan can simply shrug it off, which is what her hemistich seems to allow: the stress valley of Nimue's hemistich is followed by a slightly Lighter, more Sustained curve, facilitated by the relatively weak stress on the third syllable of "Nimue" (pronounced NIM-uh-wey), the slight over-articulation at the eighth position, and the tailed ending, which can also be used to slow and soften the movement through the line. I note that this 'softening' could work well as an activity for Morgan to play, but still, if she is going to play 'to soften' then I'd like her to have a 'harder' hemistich to deal with in the first place.*

*At this point I have some choices to make. One option would be to continue with the idea of Nimue's activity having a 'flinging' sensation and look to create a verse line that better affords such a performance. However, this 'flinging' has started to bother me. The personalisation I have had in mind (throwing a ball at someone)*

*puts someone under pressure in the sense of trying to catch them out or put them on the spot; to be effective, it relies on the fact that the other person isn't expecting the ball to be thrown. Nimue and Morgan are entering this scene mid-conversation and so it doesn't feel as though the question is being sprung on Morgan out of nowhere. On the contrary, I think that Nimue has been on this topic for quite some time. That being the case, I need to rethink the nature of the activity. Perhaps rather than 'flinging' the line at Morgan, Nimue performs a series of 'jabs'. The image that comes to mind is of a child who, having tried and failed to get a parent's attention, resorts to poking them repeatedly in the arm:*

*NIMUE      Then tell me why she hates me!*

MORGAN *But she doesn't!*

*The late dislocation in the line generates a higher level of requiredness and, as a result, there's more pressure on Morgan to complete the line quickly. In fact, despite the tailed ending, Morgan's 'softening' activity has gone out of the window.*

**NIMUE** *Tell me why she hates me!*

MORGAN *Sweet, she doesn't.*

*This version of the line is both headless and tailed. The unoccupied first position allows for a ‘jolting’ start to the line, throwing extra weight onto the first stressed syllable. It also gives Nimue’s hemistich a ‘trochaic’ rhythm. We haven’t switched*





*Nimue's 'jabbing' – then the question is, where does she go from there? She needs to get Nimue to think positively about her future – about their future, together – if she lets things blow over with Argante.*

MORGAN

*Sweet, she doesn't.*

*She loves you, as I love you, as the world*

*Will love you when you're crowned the Queen of May.*

*The extension of the line that was interrupted in the original version transforms it into a 'golden line':*

*x / x \ x / x \ x /*

*[She loves you,] | [as I love you,] | [as the world]~*

*The undulating stress pattern, combined with over-articulation at odd-numbered positions, can be experienced as a Sustained/Flexible Floating through to the under-articulated line-ending. The Sustained quality can be accentuated by giving a little extra stress to "she" and "I" (promoting these to X stresses). This can be achieved through a slight stretching of the long vowels. I personalise the movement as swirling a piece of silk around Nimue; wrapping her up in it. The activity is 'to charm enshroudingly'. The continuation of the movement into the next line seems appropriate – with the Float 'curving' through the line-ending – but I*

*think that the idea of the May Queen's crown needs to be used slightly differently.*

*That should be there to excite Nimue:*

*She loves you, as I love you, as the world*

*Will love you when it sees you in your role:*

*The May Queen, Bride of Beltane: Nimue!*

*The movement of the second line is very similar to the first and can be taken as a continuation of one Light/Sustained/Flexible/Free Floating activity, winding its way through the soft stresses and liquid consonants. The third line echoes the three part structure of the preceding lines but modifies it:*

*x / \ // x // x // x \*

*[The May Queen], | [Bride of Belt~ane:] | [Nim~ue!]*

*The intended activity is 'to excite launchingly': a series of Strong/Free Slashes, like chucking great handfuls of confetti. Such a movement is afforded by the divergent joint articulation and the Strong, uneven stress pattern in the muscle tone of the line. The higher level of over-articulation at the seventh position can be marked by a brief pause, generating metrical requiredness that can be used to 'catapult' through the final three positions.*

*Before continuing to write, I 'rehearse' the text that I have created thus far, trying to experience each movement and each activity. Having repeated this process several times, I improvise Nimue's response:*

*NIMUE           What if I'm not as special as you think?*

*The activity seems to me to be 'to reject' Morgan's attempts 'to charm' and 'to excite', or at least 'to challenge' her for assuming that everything will work out well. Such an activity is plausible in that Nimue is unlikely to let herself be won over quite so quickly. In the moment of improvisation, the initial stress valley feels like a 'grabbing' movement and the second, longer stress valley feels like 'tossing' something away. There's something aggressive about this choice of tactic which bothers me. Nimue's first activity was aggressive and I feel that she now needs to come up with something slightly different in order to counter – or perhaps 'to undermine' – Morgan's efforts.*

NIMUE        *Perhaps I'm not as special as you think.*

*Perhaps I'm stupid.*

MORGAN                      *What would that make me?*

*The Flick of the stress valley in the second part of Nimue's line remains, but the convergent opening takes the sting out of it by avoiding the acceleration through the first four positions. Rather than 'grabbing Morgan's box of confetti and throwing it on the floor', I now have more of a sense that Nimue picks up a single piece of confetti and tosses it up into the air, mocking Morgan's attempt to excite her. In the following hemistich, there is the potential for another Flick as "stupid" moves through the under-articulated foot joint at the fourth position. This feels to me like a prompt; a provocative little 'poke' or 'nudge'. This 'prompting' is aided by the shared line that, splitting at the fifth position, invites Morgan to 'fix' the foot and the line, which in this version she does. I decide to rethink this slightly:*

NIMUE        *Perhaps I'm stupid.*

MORGAN                      *And what would that make me?*

*Morgan's response turns Nimue's Flicked fifth position into a mid-line tail (an "epic caesura"<sup>591</sup>). Morgan refuses the bait of the unfinished foot and rather than*

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<sup>591</sup> Wright, *Shakespeare's Metrical Art*, 165–67.

*'jumping in', she counters Nimue's hemistich with a Glide, slowing the tempo of the line using the articulated positional joints and the potential for consecutive stresses, aided by alliteration, in the ninth and tenth positions. She completes the line, but gently 'smoothes it out' in the process, and this 'correction' of the metre echoes the mild 'rebuke' of the line. A pattern is starting to emerge in which Morgan uses the movement of the verse in an attempt to encourage Nimue and to make her feel better, but whenever Nimue tries to 'thrust' a line at her, she steers it back towards a more convergent rhythm. The last time that Morgan got hold of the verse she tried 'to charm' and then 'to excite' Nimue. That didn't achieve the desired results and so she needs to change tack:*

*NIMUE*      *Perhaps I'm stupid.*

MORGAN *And what would that make me?*

*A dunce? A clod?*

*NIMUE* *I'm ugly!*

MORGAN *Then I'm blind.*

*Morgan tries to amuse Nimue instead, teasing her with two 'prods'. Nimue isn't ready to be teased and 'shoves' Morgan away with her intervention into the shared line. By giving fairly even, deliberate stress to the monosyllables of the final three positions, Morgan can once again resist and correct this attempt to disrupt the movement of the verse line, playing 'to calm' by 'pulling' the verse line back into shape:*

x / x / x // x / \ /

*A dunce? | A clod? | I'm ug~ly! | Then I'm blind.*

*I now have a version of this passage in which every decision regarding the construction of the verse has been made in order to facilitate a specific choice of dramatic activity.*

NIMUE      *Tell me why she hates me! **[to pressurise jabbingly]***

MORGAN                      *Sweet, she doesn't. **[to defuse steeringly]***

*She loves you, as I love you, as the world      **[to charm***

*Will love you when it sees you in your role:      **enshroudingly]***

*The May Queen, Bride of Beltane: Nimue! **[to excite launchingly]***

NIMUE      *Perhaps I'm not as special as you think. **[to undermine tossingly]***

*Perhaps I'm stupid. **[to prompt nudgingly]***

MORGAN                      *And what would that make me? **[to rebuke***  
***smoothingly]***

*A dunce? A clod? **[to amuse proddingly]***

NIMUE                      *I'm ugly! **[to reject shovingly]***

MORGAN                      *Then I'm blind. **[to calm pullingly]***

This account demonstrates that the Motion in Poetry Metaphor and the principles of the Verse Psychology Game can be used as heuristic tools in the process of composition. Within this mode of writing, questioning and exploring the performative potential of the verse becomes an integral part of questioning and exploring the action of the scene. Giving attention to this particular passage also highlights the fact that verse does not need to be 'poetic' or 'lyrical' in order to be understood and experienced as active.

This does, however, raise another question: as an actor, could one not make similar choices of activity without bothering about the verse at all? That is to say, by basing one's decisions purely on the content and context of the text and, essentially, speaking it as prose? The answer is yes, up to a point. And, up to a point, the answer has to be yes. In writing this scene, the aim of using verse is not to make a text active that would otherwise be completely passive, but to heighten and intensify the action by adding an extra dimension: the potential to embody the psychophysical sensation of each activity within the verse rhythm. It is using the verse in this way that transforms an active choice into a hyperactive choice. The judgement I must make as the playwright is whether the play as a whole (the 'lusory arena') and the immediate dramatic circumstances are sufficiently heightened to render hyperactive choices plausible. I would say that, for the characters, the stakes of the scene are high but that, in relation to the magnitude of the Industrial Action of the play as a whole, this moment from the early stages of the play is relatively low key. On that basis, I suggest that hyperactivity is plausible here as part of a much larger sequence of action but that, as reflected in the 'simplicity' of the passage, I do not need to use the verse to its full hyperactive capacity.



## Owain

Soliloquies present a different challenge for the playwright-as-gamewright. On the one hand, they seem to provide the perfect opportunity to use verse to its full potential. On the other hand, they seem to provide the perfect opportunity for action to grind to a halt. In this section, I offer an account of my work on lines taken from a speech given by the character of Owain. The reasons for examining this passage are that, firstly, it demonstrates that principles of the Verse Psychology Game can still be applied when composing text for a character alone on stage and that, secondly, the techniques employed in creating this passage differ slightly from those explored in the previous section. The lines on which I intend to focus are:

How high, proud Arthur's angel, you dare fly

On waxen wings, as though there were no heat

Above you, in you – ay, or under you –

But I will see you plummet. I'm all fire!

And oh, my dripping mistress, how you melt.

Owain is a knight at Arthur's court. His character is an exploration of 'masculine' ideals gone wrong. Brought up on tales of male heroism, he expected to be a hero himself: a knight of Arthur's round table, fighting battles and completing quests.

Unfortunately for Owain, he was born a generation too late. Arthur's age of heroism is over.

Owain believes the women of Avalon to be witches. In the first act, he tried to interrupt the Beltane Festival and was cursed by the May Queen. In that moment, he was struck by a bolt of lightning. He survived the ordeal but has been left 'deformed'. At this stage, everyone in Carlisle believes Nimue to have been the May Queen. The threat of Nimue's magical powers, along with the fact that Arthur appears to have fallen in love with her, gives her considerable power over Owain, and she has just forced him to kneel before her and swear an oath of allegiance. Nimue is playing a dangerous game: in fact, Morgan was the May Queen, Morgan uttered the curse against Owain, Morgan was the girl to whom Arthur lost his heart. In encouraging Arthur and those around him in their belief that she was the May Queen, Nimue is able to further her ambitions and to protect Morgan, but she is in constant danger of being found out. Over the course of the scene leading up to this speech, Owain has started to suspect that Nimue isn't who she says she is. At Beltane, there were two young women wearing festival masks: one was the May Queen, a powerful 'witch' to be feared; the other was just a child, who tried to fight Owain and lost.

Initially, I imagined that when Nimue left the scene Owain would talk to the audience but when I sat down to write I found myself staring at a blank sheet of paper. In terms of the story, I knew that the 'event' of the speech would be Owain's realisation that Nimue has been lying and his decision to play along with her story until he could find a good time to take revenge. What I wasn't sure of was how to

make the speech active rather than simply 'expressing' Owain's thoughts and feelings. In the end, I made two decisions that allowed me to find a way into the speech. The first was that Owain wouldn't talk to the audience: although she had left the scene, Owain's action and his speech would be directed at Nimue. The second was that, rather than writing and revising in the manner described in the previous section, I would try to make a specific decision about the psychophysical sensations of the activities before starting to write, and eschew conscious analysis of the verse until after I had a construction that 'felt right'. Given the nature of this approach, the following account is based on notes made shortly after the act of composition:

*The person Owain is trying to affect is himself, but he uses the image of Nimue in order to pursue his action, which is 'to regain his status'. Put simply, Owain is living out a violent fantasy of humiliating and abusing Nimue in order to make himself feel big. In order to make decisions about the activities, I started by exploring Working Actions that I felt, intuitively, might fit with plausible and playable choices for the situation and the action: these included slowly twisting the head off a doll, smearing oil on someone's face, chopping meat, jabbing someone in the chest and squeezing water from an old towel. In approaching the opening of the speech, I decided to work with the first of these and created what was a fairly complex sequence of movements: squeezing the doll, twisting its head around, first slowly and then more quickly before finally yanking it away from the body. I came to the conclusion that this could be treated as one long Wring (Strong/Flexible/Sustained) divided into various stages and used as the experiential metaphor for the activity 'to degrade'.*

*Working from the psychophysical sensation – or series of sensations – generated by enacting this movement sequence, I created the first four lines of the speech:*

*\ // \ // x // x / \ /*

*How high, | proud Ar~thur's an~gel, you dare fly~*

*This intention with the first line was to embody the first 'squeezing' stage of the movement sequence. The line is convergent in its bone structure. In terms of joint articulation, there is over-articulation at the second and seventh positions and under-articulation at the fourth and sixth positions and at the line-ending. The muscle tone of the line involves a high level of stress throughout, with relatively strong stresses occupying several weak positions. An examination of the muscle tissue identifies alliteration that might further accentuate the strong stresses in the relevant syllables and a high frequency of long vowels, with such speech sounds occupying all of the strong positions and three of the five weak positions. This can be treated as Wringing with Strong/Sustained movement through the abundant strong stresses and prolonged vowel sounds and a 'stretching', 'curved' quality through the under-articulated joints and line-ending. The movement continues into the next line:*

*x // x // x / x X \ /*

*On wax~en wings, | as though there were no heat~*

*The movement from the end of the previous line and through the first hemistich was intended to be the initial ‘twist’ of the doll’s head. Structurally, the features echo those of the first line but the shift in the muscle tissue from long to short vowels, following the ‘curved’ deceleration at the line-ending can be used to Quicken the movement. What follows might be thought of as a ‘recovery’ within the movement. The over-articulation at the fourth position creates a second hemistich with a low level of requiredness: this allows the movement to settle back into a more Sustained tempo. The hemistich is fairly convergent, with a slight divergence in muscle tone in the eighth and ninth positions. The relatively weak stress in the eighth affords a slight ‘curving’ quality, leading through to the relatively strong stress in the ninth, which can be used to slow the rhythm as it moves to the line-ending.*

x / x / x // x // x \

*Above you, | in you – | Ay, | or un~der you! – ~*

*This line was intended as several ‘twists of the head’. The analysis of the line shows that it can be understood as a series of short irregular subunits, each of which is dominated by a single stress. The joint articulation is diverging from the Neutral Line pattern of feet, whilst the muscle tone, by maintaining the relative weak-strong pattern within each foot, converges with the Neutral Line’s internal structure. This allows for a rhythmical performance in which the integrity of the gestalt is maintained by the stress pattern, whilst the irregularity of the subunits is highlighted to create the sensation of a disjointed sequence.*

*This line could be treated as a series of Slashes. Within the ongoing movement of the lines it might be experienced as a Quicker phase within the Sustained Wringing quality. The next line takes us into what was intended as the final ‘twist of the head’ before ‘ripping it off’:*

*x \ x / x // x / \ //*

*But I will see you plumm~et. | I’m all fire!*

*There is convergence through the first and second feet. The third foot leads into the under-articulated joint at the sixth position followed by the over-articulation at the seventh position. The intention is for a gentle build and then a Strong/Quick ‘twist’ at the under-articulated joint. This is supported by the plosive word onset and the switch to a short vowel in the strong sixth position. The caesura at the seventh position generates a high level of requiredness, encouraging Strong movement through to “fire”, which is the point of ‘ripping the head off’. The next line completes the ‘thought’, but goes beyond the end of the Wringing movement sequence I had planned. It was written intuitively as a ‘recovery’ from the exertion of the preceding lines:*

*x / x / x // x / X //*

*And oh, | my dripp~ing mis~tress, | how you melt.*

*The analysis shows that it echoes the construction of the first line of the speech, though ‘softened’ somewhat by the absence of strong stresses in weak positions. The activity I assigned to the line retrospectively was ‘to mock strokingly’, with the idea of being a faux-comforting stroke on the head of the child whose doll I’d just destroyed. The softened echoing of the first line – which I cannot claim was planned but I decided to keep – seemed useful in emphasising the progression through the action from the need for the Contending activity ‘to drag Nimue down from her position above him’, to a more Yielding, condescending activity as Owain is now able to ‘look down on her’.*

Composing verse from the sensations of Working Actions means the constructions of the lines produced are bound to fall within the ‘comfort zone’ of the writer’s rhythmic competence. I believe this is reflected in the lines that I have just analysed: the divergent features are not particularly outlandish. There is no reason to suggest that divergent lines are ‘better’ than more convergent ones. What needs to be questioned is whether the range of my rhythmic competence is wide enough to allow the option of composing more divergent lines as part of an intuitive writing process. If not, then one’s ability to respond to differences between one personalised Working Action and another (e.g. between different instances of Pressing) will be hampered and one is likely to see repetitions of very similar constructions being used in an attempt to capture supposedly different qualities of movement. This is a weakness that I identified in my own work on *The Lady of the Lake* and is one of the reasons for developing the exercises described earlier in this chapter. In demonstrating the first exercise, I began by attempting a more or less generic Slashing quality:

x // x X x // x X x /

I'll slap you with the Slash~ing of this line!

Constructions of this kind appear frequently in the script of *The Lady of the Lake*.

In Act 1 Scene 1, Argante has two lines that might be analysed and performed in a similar way within her first conversational turn:

x / x X x // x X x /

And how were you expect~ing me to look?

And:

x / x X x // x X X /

I'm told you've been cavort~ing in Carlisle!

There are, of course, slight differences but both are intended as Slashes and both exhibit similar features to the line produced in the exercise. The similarity between these two lines is intentional within the context of the scene, but it is revealing that these Slashing lines bear a striking resemblance to the first construction that I produced in the exercise. Were they constructed in this way because such a construction was the 'best fit' for the specific activity I wanted to create or because such a construction is, within my own intuitive process, an easy, 'go to' Slashing construction? To answer that question, one must be secure in one's ability to produce alternative constructions. A little way into the exercise I created a line



exhibiting a 'stress maximum in a weak position', a feature that does not appear anywhere in the versification of *The Lady of the Lake*. Given that such constructions are divergent enough for Halle and Keyser to have labelled them 'unmetrical' and so rare within the canon of English iambic pentameter that Tsur had to scour great swathes of Milton, Shakespeare and Shelley in order to create a list of fifty examples<sup>592</sup>, their absence from my own work is perhaps unsurprising. As demonstrated in the exercise, however, such a feature might be useful in the embodiment of a quality of Slashing movement (or, combined with other features, the quality of a different Working Action altogether) different from those qualities afforded by the 'easier', more convergent structure. By practising constructions including this feature and assessing their performative potential as part of a 'technical' exercise, I can bring the composition of such lines into my rhythmic competence so that, if and when such constructions are useful as part of a creative process, I am capable of composing them intuitively on the basis of psychophysical sensations.

My aim has been to develop a new methodology for the creation of original dramatic verse in which metrical verse is composed and analysed on the basis of its potential to make a positive contribution to the embodied dramatic action of a play. The exercises explored in this chapter and the accounts of my work on the script of *The Lady of the Lake* demonstrate this new approach. Such demonstrations have, inevitably, been restricted by my own limitations as a composer of dramatic verse. Such limitations do not, however, undermine the principles of the methodology. Moreover, I have been able to show that my own

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<sup>592</sup> Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm*, 449–52.

levels of competence have increased and that I am able to identify areas of weakness within and routes to the improvement of my own creative practice. This has been made possible by my efforts to work within the framework of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor and the Verse Psychology Game.

## Epilogue: What's in a Game?

### Game in Progress

The aim of this thesis has been to develop a psychophysical, action-based approach to the composition and analysis of metrical dramatic verse. The primary purpose of presenting this new approach has been to facilitate the further development of my own practice as a contemporary verse dramatist and to establish pedagogical principles that can be used to train other playwrights wishing to create new works of verse drama. Prior to this research there was no coherent model to explain how a playwright's use of metrical verse might contribute to the Interpersonal Action of drama, nor a practical methodology that enabled verse to be composed, analysed, revised and evaluated on the basis of its active or hyperactive potential. In presenting the theories and techniques of the Verse Psychology Game, this thesis makes an original contribution to the practice and pedagogy of contemporary dramatic writing.

Through the application of the Anatomical Approach to metrical analysis within the Verse Psychology Game framework, lines of iambic pentameter can be understood as presenting specific perceptual features that are available to conscious examination. These features give rise to rhythmical affordances, and those affordances can be realised in rhythmical performance.

By virtue of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, rhythmical performances of iambic pentameter allow verse rhythms to be understood and experienced as purposeful

movements of the human body. Placed within an appropriate dramatic context, these movements can, in turn, be understood and experienced as the embodied, psychophysical sensations of specific dramatic activities. By having the potential to embody the experiential qualities of dramatic activities in a manner that is beyond the capacity of naturalistic prose, metrical verse can be understood as serving a hyperactive dramatic function and, therefore, as making a positive contribution to the Interpersonal Action of drama.

This new understanding of a positive dramatic function for metrical verse means that contemporary dramatists can learn to compose and analyse lines on the basis of their performative potential and, through the use of practical writing exercises, become 'sensitised' to the hyperactive, experiential qualities of verse rhythm. This 'sensitisation' can be understood as the development and extension of the practitioner's rhythmic competence. These exercises rehearse methods of composition that can be thought of as 'technical', 'experiential' or combinations of the two. By 'technical' I mean exercises involving the deliberate, conscious manipulation of the features of verse construction in order to promote particular rhythmical affordances. By 'experiential' I mean exercises that make intuitive use of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, so that verse lines are shaped on the basis of embodied psychophysical sensations that may be experienced by the playwright in the act of composition. As outlined in Chapter 6, these techniques can feed directly into the creation of original dramatic material. By training the rhythmic competence of the playwright, these exercises may also be understood as feeding into and informing the future work of the dramatist, even when such techniques are not consciously employed. Such an understanding is in line with competence

models of skill acquisition in which the final stage of the process is commonly referred to as ‘unconscious competence’<sup>593</sup>.

I consider that the identification of the challenges in linking verse to action marked my own transition from ‘unconscious incompetence’ to ‘conscious incompetence’, and that the progression to a level of ‘conscious competence’ can be attributed to the theories and techniques of the Verse Psychology Game and the Motion in Poetry Metaphor. This is by no means to claim that I have mastered the art of dramatic versification. On the contrary, the value of the approach lies in the fact that it allows me to analyse and recognise areas of strength and weakness in my work according to specific criteria and to employ practical techniques as part of my ongoing development. Moreover, because the Verse Psychology Game framework presents the playwright with useful questions (e.g. ‘How might feature *x* contribute to the embodiment of activity *y*?’) rather than with a series of readymade answers (e.g. ‘In order to produce activity *a*, construct a line made up of features *b*, *c* and *d*.’), I submit that the principles and techniques of this approach might be employed by other playwrights to construct lines, create plays and achieve levels of rhythmic competence beyond the limits of my own abilities. I take this to be a virtue of the approach and thus my practical explorations are included in this thesis as the documented demonstrations of a process, not as examples of a ‘finished product’.

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<sup>593</sup> e.g. Jack Mezirow, ‘A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education’, *Adult Education Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (9 January 1981): 3–24.

No matter how brilliantly it is employed, the approach has its limitations. In the first chapter I made reference to Denis Donoghue's pronouncement that one of the main problems with modern verse drama is that its exponents have created 'bad plays'. It cannot be claimed that the principles and techniques of the Verse Psychology Game, taken by themselves, have the capacity to transform 'bad' plays into 'good' ones. A wide spectrum of factors contribute to the creation of a new piece of dramatic writing, many of which there has been no space to discuss in this thesis. Verse plays, including my own, may have any number of faults that have little or nothing to do with the issues investigated as part of this research process. It is entirely feasible, therefore, that a playwright with high levels of rhythmic competence might employ the principles and techniques of the Verse Psychology Game rigorously and still produce a 'bad' play.

However, I suggest that with additional research the principles of the approach outlined here might be expanded to inform further aspects of the writing process. In this thesis, my focus has been on the relationship between the verse and action at a 'micro' level. Individual dramatic activities might be thought of as the atoms of dramatic action. These atoms make up larger structures, and it may be possible to adapt the principles of the Verse Psychology Game to address aspects of dramatic writing such as the creation of character 'types' or 'personalities' and the understanding of the dynamics which define relationships between characters. Choosing and trying to create particular sequences of activities impacts on and responds to these considerations in any case and this can be seen, at a basic level, in the discussion of my work on *The Lady of the Lake*. In the exchange between Morgan and Nimue it becomes clear that the interplay of activities has a

bearing on the nature of their relationship as well as on the nature of their characters.

To expand on this observation would require further development of the metrical theory involved in the Verse Psychology Game and a more thorough investigation of the contested concept of dramatic character. In terms of metrical analysis, if one thinks of the considerations of exploring character and relationships as involving the analysis of larger patterns of construction, then lessons may be learned from the approaches of the “Russian school”<sup>594</sup>, as seen in the work of metrical theorists such as Marina Tarlinskaja. These approaches consider much larger expanses of text than those I have attempted to analyse using the detailed feature-by-feature and, indeed, feature-in-relation-to-feature approach developed in this thesis. Approaches such as Tarlinskaja’s can be useful for identifying recurring patterns over the course of a play, for example, and have therefore been put to use in tasks such as attributing verse to different authors within collaboratively written texts. They inevitably involve a great deal of ‘counting’ features (the number of ‘feminine endings’ in a text<sup>595</sup>, for example), which may seem a rather reductive exercise within the context of the Verse Psychology Game. The challenge would be to marry the complex considerations of features that combine in different ways, may be used differently in different contexts and that, indeed, may afford multiple performance possibilities in each instance, with the consideration of much larger numbers of lines. From the perspective of composition, questions would need to be explored in terms of the nature of the

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<sup>594</sup> Marina Tarlinskaja, ““Russian School” and Verse Attribution: Henry VIII’ in Küper, ed. *Current Trends in Metrical Analysis*, 63–78.

<sup>595</sup> Marina Tarlinskaja, *Shakespeare and the Versification of English Drama, 1561-1642* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 6.

patterns that were to be created. This would have to avoid reducing this approach to a system such as ‘character x uses lots of initial stress valleys’, which would rather undermine the more nuanced discussion of affordances, performance choices and specific psychophysical sensations.

The nature of these larger patterns, and a discussion of the best analytic tools with which to examine them, would largely depend on the conception of character that was being explored as part of the writing process. In this thesis I have made an assumption about the nature of character: by ascribing ‘psychological’ actions and activities to dramatic characters I have adopted an approach in which such characters are regarded as ‘substantive’ agents within the world of the play. However, I have not entered into a discussion about the various ways in which individual characters might be ‘defined’ or identified as possessing a particular ‘personality’ or adhering to a particular ‘type’.

The *Laban-Malmgren System* offers a rich and complex understanding of dramatic character, in which characters are analysed and interpreted in terms of “Inner Attitudes”<sup>596</sup> and “Action Attitudes”<sup>597</sup>. Building on the foundational metaphor of the *System* – psychological action is physical action – these ‘attitudes’ are embodied in performance through different combinations of Motion Factors: thus, for example, the Motion Factors of Weight and Space might be more prominent in one character, whereas the Motion Factors of Time and Flow might be more prominent in another. A study of how these principles might be reflected in the verse of a

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<sup>596</sup> See Fettes, *A Peopled Labyrinth*, 105–10.

<sup>597</sup> See Mirodan, ‘The Way of Transformation’, 396–406.



character over the course of a play could build on the work of this thesis and further inform the theory and practice of verse drama in the twenty-first century.

### Advising the Players

Although the starting point for this thesis lay in questions about the writing process, it became clear at an early stage that my understanding of verse in drama from a playwright's perspective was heavily reliant on an understanding of how actors might use that verse. Whether or not actors do use the verse in accordance with the principles outlined in this thesis does not, in and of itself, wholly determine the value of the approach for the playwright. A playwright might find the approach useful and value the ability to succeed in creating text that affords hyperactive performance choices, even if the script is never performed in that way or, for that matter, even if the script is never performed for an audience at all. However, the conception of the playwright-as-gamewright is based on the idea that the Verse Psychology Game can be played – and actors are the people to do it. In addition to the playwright's stake in making verse active, the ability to link action-playing and verse-speaking in the manner described in this thesis has the potential to be of great benefit to actors themselves, whether they are engaged in interpreting a new verse play for performance or whether they choose to play the game with texts such as Shakespeare's.

Within the framework of the Verse Psychology Game, verse rhythm can be interpreted on the basis of its performative potential and used to embody the

psychophysical sensations of dramatic activities. For an actor working in this way, action-playing and verse-speaking are mutually-reinforcing elements of embodied performance, rather than competing demands to be carefully kept in balance. Furthermore, the process of making plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices liberates the actor from the reductive rule-following of some contemporary approaches and the “vague and woolly”, to return to William Gaskill’s words, imponderables of others.

My analysis and interpretation of Shakespearean verse lines, along with the discussion of my own verse constructions, outlines the way in which it is possible to use the Anatomical Approach and the principles of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor to identify plausible, perceivable and playable performance choices for lines of dramatic iambic pentameter. Theoretically, actors could use the same system of analysis. Practically, however, this system might be better suited to providing an understanding of what actors might do with metrical verse than to being used as a tool for actors to employ themselves. Put simply, whilst the aim of the Anatomical Approach is always to uncover and examine the experiential qualities and performative potential of the verse, mastering a system for analysing the technical details of verse construction may be less useful to the actor than an iterative process of embodied ‘sensitisation’.

What is needed, then, is a coherent and sequential programme of practical exercises to be carried out, not with pen and paper, but through physical exploration in the classrooms of drama schools and the rehearsal studios of the professional theatre. In this respect, the work of practitioners such as Cicely Berry

and Patsy Rodenburg has a great deal to offer, and it may be that by adapting and repurposing some of the exercises recommended by these practitioners, links can be forged with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game. In this way the rhythmic competence of actors can not only be expanded, but also explored in relation to the possibilities of hyperactive performance. The processes by which actors might gain embodied understandings of these principles and become sensitised to the performative potential of metrical verse are comparable to the training systems involved in other physical practices such as dance<sup>598</sup> and martial arts<sup>599</sup>. These require iterative cycles of physical work that take place over considerable periods of time, and the ability of such techniques to affect and change an actor's processes of embodied cognition have been explored by contemporary theorists such as Gabriele Sofia<sup>600</sup>. I suggest that the most fruitful way of exploring these possibilities might be through the inception of a long-term action research project in the form of a "co-operative inquiry"<sup>601</sup>, bringing together and drawing upon the skills not only of actors and writers, but of directors and acting teachers and those with specialist expertise in voice and movement work for the actor. Such a project might lead beyond a focus on the individual actor's interpretation of a text and into the collaborative work of the full rehearsal process.

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<sup>598</sup> Erica Stanton, 'Doing, Re-Doing and Undoing: Practice, Repetition and Critical Evaluation as Mechanisms for Learning in a Dance Technique Class "laboratory"', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 2, no. 1 (1 March 2011): 86–98.

<sup>599</sup> Greg Downey, "'Practice without Theory": A Neuroanthropological Perspective on Embodied Learning', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16 (1 May 2010): S22–40.

<sup>600</sup> Gabriele Sofia, 'The Effects of Theatre Training on Cognitive Functions' in Nicola Shaughnessy, ed., *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science: Body, Brain and Being* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 171–81.

<sup>601</sup> John Heron and Peter Reason, 'The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry' in Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds., *Handbook of Action Research: Concise Paperback Edition* (London: SAGE, 2006), 144–154.

I have not discussed the rehearsal or performance of my own play as part of this thesis. This is because, for one thing, my role in the professional production was that of the playwright. I was not performing in nor directing the piece and to have intervened in the processes of other practitioners – in the sense of trying to enculturate them into a new way of working as part of my own research – would have been an unprofessional and perhaps unwelcome course of action. Even if I had been in a position to determine the nature of the actors' preparations for performance, this new way of working has not yet been fully developed for the purposes of a rehearsal room environment. Moreover, a process for training actors in the techniques of the Verse Psychology Game could reasonably be expected to involve a much longer period of sensitisation than the rehearsal time for this production, mounted as part of a repertory season, could have allowed.

Although this was not, therefore, an opportunity to attempt to train or enculturate other practitioners into the ways of the Verse Psychology Game, it was an opportunity to observe, albeit informally, the extent to which talented professional actors might use verse hyperactively as part of their existing processes of rehearsal and performance. It would be inaccurate to say that the actors always made choices in line with the principles explored in this thesis, but I observed a number of instances in which the actors were doing things that one might expect them to do if they were consciously engaged in the Verse Psychology Game. This in itself should not be surprising. As stated at the outset, actors with high levels of rhythmic competence – gained either intuitively or as the result of long experience – may not need to use any method of conscious analysis in order to identify and execute rhythmical performances of metrical verse. With that in mind, it is conceivable, likely even, that some actors would use verse hyperactively without

needing to have any explicit knowledge of the Verse Psychology Game principles. It could prove an interesting and enlightening study, therefore, to examine the extent to which contemporary professional actors, who have not been exposed to the principles of this thesis, make performance choices that could be considered plausible, perceivable and playable when working with metrical dramatic verse. Such a study might involve extensive analysis of recorded performances by professional theatre companies.

### Audience Interaction

In this thesis, I have not addressed the ways in which metrical dramatic verse might be used to affect an audience. Part of the reason for this is that, as Tsur tells us, the impact of verse on the listener depends not only on the way in which the verse is constructed on the page but on the way in which that verse is embodied in rhythmical performance. The audience does not usually read a dramatic text, the audience 'reads' the theatrical presentation of that text and the performances of the actors, and so, until one has a group of actors performing verse in accordance with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game, it seems necessary to suspend considerations of how the impact of the verse on the spectator might reflect those principles. Even if a play is performed in accordance with the principles of the Verse Psychology Game, the challenges of assessing audience response remain considerable.

How, for instance, might one isolate responses to the hyperactive use of metrical verse from responses to other aspects of seeing a play in performance? Such aspects include the construction of the plot, the physical appearance of the actors, and the features of the lighting design. These, and numerous other factors, might affect the way in which we respond to a particular live performance. I have cast doubt on Eliot's idea that the effects of verse should be 'unconscious', but there is a difference between the verse intruding on the conscious perceptions of an audience member and making the verse the focus of that audience member's attention. To ask audiences to give opinions on the relationship between action and verse in performances they witness – assuming that such a question would be intelligible to audience members in the first place – may well distort the way in which the play is viewed and therefore give a false impression of ways in which audiences might 'typically' respond.

This raises further questions about who the audience members are, the concepts and experiences that they bring with them to the performance and the criteria by which they assess what they see and experience. Are we to explore the responses of audiences made up of theatre practitioners? Regular playgoers? Theatrical virgins? Critics? Smith and Dean note that critical responses to theatre, and all art forms, can be unreliable in determining the 'success' or 'artistic merit' of a work, noting that many critics reviled Pinter's early work<sup>602</sup>. On the other hand, the plays of Christopher Fry – much derided by Donoghue as displays of verbal vanity rather than dramatic action<sup>603</sup> – were highly praised by many when they were first

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<sup>602</sup> Smith and Dean, *Practice-Led Research*, 26.

<sup>603</sup> Donoghue, *The Third Voice*, 186–87.

presented<sup>604</sup>. Maxwell notes that responses to his own plays have been “a certain dizzying cocktail: high praise and low derision, sometimes for the same play, often for the same performance – and therefore cancelling out to little but a wry perspective on the business, a genial but total contempt for those munching bystanders who risk nothing, and a brand new blank slate”<sup>605</sup>.

I would argue that, from the playwright’s perspective one of the advantages of the Verse Psychology Game framework is precisely the fact that it provides a set of criteria by which to judge aspects of one’s own work. However, this does not tell me if and how the verse is affecting the audience. One possible avenue of exploration would be to follow the growing trend of neuroscientific investigations into the work of performers and the responses they elicit in their audiences. So popular has it become to link theatre practice to neuroscientific research that some have felt the need to caution us against the ‘neuromania’ that has swept contemporary performance theory<sup>606</sup>. However, I submit that neurophysiological responses to the Motion in Poetry Metaphor, in both actors and audiences, would be well worth examining.

The discovery and study of mirror neuron systems in apes (and their putative existence in the human brain)<sup>607</sup>, for example – reported as causing the brain to imitate the “goal-directed bodily actions”<sup>608</sup> observed in the behaviour of others –

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<sup>604</sup> Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama*, 53.

<sup>605</sup> Maxwell, *On Poetry*, 130.

<sup>606</sup> Nicola Shaughnessy, ‘Operating in Science Theatres’ in Shaughnessy, ed., *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science*, 9–13.

<sup>607</sup> Giacomo Rizzolatti et al., ‘Premotor Cortex and the Recognition of Motor Actions’, *Cognitive Brain Research*, Mental representations of motor acts, 3, no. 2 (March 1996): 131–41.

<sup>608</sup> Christian Keysers, *The Empathic Brain* (Kindle Edition: Social Brain Press, 2011), 165.

might have light to shed on the perception of purposeful movements in the rhythms of metrical verse. Investigations have begun into whether the use of the conceptual metaphors discussed by Lakoff and Johnson has a measurable neurophysiological impact on the behaviour of the brain<sup>609</sup>. If it could be shown that an actor's perception and subsequent rhythmical performance of a Pressing verse line, for instance, fired neurophysiological responses in speaker and/or listener that imitated or 'echoed' the responses associated with the enactment of such a physical movement, then this would provide new insight into the impact of verse on actors and audiences, without becoming confused with broader questions about the overall experience of watching a particular production of a play.

### Playing On

I suggest, then, that there are at least four ways in which I and others might expand on the work of this thesis:

1. Widening the scope of the Verse Psychology Game as a framework for metrical composition and analysis, so that it can be used to explore verse drama at the macro as well as the micro level and thus address questions of character and relationships alongside those of moment-to-moment action-playing.

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<sup>609</sup> Vittorio Gallese and George Lakoff, 'The Brain's Concepts: The Role of the Sensory-Motor System in Conceptual Knowledge', *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 22, no. 3–4 (1 May 2005): 455–79.



2. Adapting the principles of the Anatomical Approach to metrical analysis and interpretation to the needs of actor training and performance practice. This might involve a long-term action research project in the form of a “cooperative enquiry”, bringing together and drawing upon the skills of actors, directors and instructors with specialist expertise in movement, voice, Stanislavskian acting and the techniques of the *Laban-Malmgren System*.
3. Conducting a survey of contemporary performances of verse plays to determine the extent to which twenty-first century actors make performance choices that could be considered as adhering to the principles of the Verse Psychology Game and in order to examine, if and when actors do work in this way, whether there might be particular connections to existing training systems and/or professional rehearsal practices.
4. Exploring the neurophysiological effects of the Motion in Poetry Metaphor on writers, performers and audiences. Such a research project would join the tradition of collaboration between neuroscientists and performance practitioners that has proved so fruitful in the early twenty-first century.

The original contribution of this thesis is to redefine the relationship between dramatic verse and dramatic action, to demonstrate that I, as a contemporary playwright, can learn to understand and experience metrical dramatic verse as embodying the sensations of dramatic activities, and to provide a framework within which other practitioners, by employing and adapting these methodologies, might learn to do the same. My contention is that the theories and techniques of the Verse Psychology Game have the potential to reinvigorate the use of metrical verse in twenty-first century British theatre practice, providing ways of making and

mining a verse text that are not mere “exercises in archaeology”<sup>610</sup>, but that break new ground and lay the foundations for exciting future developments. Steiner concluded that efforts to create verse plays for the contemporary theatre were “attempts to blow fire into cold ash. It cannot be done.”<sup>611</sup> I conclude that the ability to understand and experience metrical verse as embodying dramatic action is a spark of new fire, and that original material composed on that basis has the potential to burn bright on the contemporary stage. It can be done. The game’s afoot – or perhaps a series of feet – and all we need do is play.

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<sup>610</sup> Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, 305.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

Appendix I: Excerpts from *The Lady of the Lake*

A: Excerpt from Act 1, Scene 1

**MORGAN** Lady, do not look so angrily.

**ARGANTE** And how were you expecting me to look?  
Do you deserve a warmer welcome, child?  
I'm told you've been cavorting in Carlisle.

**MORGAN** Cavorting?

**ARGANTE** Ay, cavorting!

**NIMUE** Oh, cavorting?  
I'm not sure I've 'cavorted' in my life.  
But please, lady, teach me to cavort –  
It sounds the sort of thing that I might like.

**ARGANTE** That city is no place for pretty girls.

**NIMUE** For 'pretty girls'? We're Daughters of the Lake.

**ARGANTE** You are, my child, when you are by the lake,  
But tramping through the puddles of Carlisle  
Like two-a-penny tuggers of men's sleeves,  
Painted like April Maypoles –

**NIMUE** We're not whores!

**MORGAN** We're children of the Goddess.

**NIMUE** Ay!

**ARGANTE** Indeed?  
Much good may that do you in Carlisle.

B: Excerpt from Act 1, Scene 3

**NIMUE** Tell me why she hates me!

**MORGAN** Sweet, she doesn't.  
She loves you, as I love you, as the world  
Will love you when it sees you in your role:  
The May Queen, Bride of Beltane, Nimue!

**NIMUE** Perhaps I'm not as special as you think.  
Perhaps I'm stupid!

**MORGAN** And what would that make me?  
A dunce? A clod?

**NIMUE** I'm ugly!

**MORGAN** Then I'm blind.  
Telling me you lack beauty makes less sense  
Than telling me that Rheged needs more rain,  
Which by the way it doesn't! We have lakes  
Enough without you adding to them. See?  
See even when you're crying, even then –  
And I think this is terribly unfair –  
Your beauty is embarrassing. Look here:  
Tears make your eyes, as ripples make still ponds,  
More perfect in the moments when they settle.  
But I, if I should ever shed a tear,  
Am instantly abominable – it's true!  
I look like something dredged up from the deep,  
Like something mythological. I do.  
So you must be the princess of this tale  
And that makes me the monster – do not laugh!  
I'm trying to be terrifying!

**NIMUE** No,  
I've seen you being terrifying.

**MORGAN** Yes,  
And I don't think we need to talk of that.

C: Excerpt from Act 2, Scene 4

**NIMUE** I don't need love, I need your loyalty  
And I will see you swear it, sir, on this.

**OWAIN** On this... pretty dagger?

**NIMUE** Ay, on this.

**OWAIN** What is it you offer in return?  
If I'm your creature pet me, if I'm not  
Then you are not my master, and be warned  
You shall not shake my muzzle from your flesh.

**NIMUE** Oh, I will strike and stroke as you deserve,  
But bite me and I will see you destroyed.

*OWAIN examines the dagger, smiles and kisses it. NIMUE pats him on the head and turns to leave.*

**OWAIN** No more reward for my obedience?

**NIMUE** As cats with kings, thus with dogs and queens  
And here is the indulgence you'll receive. *[Steps out of her soiled dress]*  
Arrest the witch on my authority.  
Soft mouth, boy; I would have her here intact. *[Exit]*

**OWAIN** How high, proud Arthur's angel, you dare fly  
On waxen wings, as though there were no heat  
Above you, in you – ay, or under you –  
But I will see you plummet. I'm all fire!  
And oh, my dripping mistress, how you melt.  
In old wives' tales disguises fool all men  
But now, young whore, your story wears so thin  
That I can see my fingers through it! *[Sniffs Nimue's dress]*  
Smears of shit can't smother out this scent  
Of sun-spiced skin and hedge-warm elderflower –  
I drowned in it at Beltane! – this hot stench  
Of sulphur, fear and cunt-grease – I know you.  
Oh ay, great queen, I know you, I know you!  
On May Day when the May Queen made me thus  
You stammered and you stuttered, cried for help  
Like some neglected child whose soft dad  
Never struck her hard enough – And, what?  
What does our sweet princess whine for now?  
Your lady to be shackled? So be it.  
For once the head of Avalon's hacked off  
There'll still be time to mutilate its corpse,  
So though this tale is destined to be mine  
I'll let your little chapter run its course.  
I go to do your dirty work, my queen,  
Whilst you scrub stains too stubborn to come clean. *[Exit]*

## Appendix II: Biographical Note

Benjamin Askew trained as an actor at Drama Centre London. Theatre credits include: *The Winter's Tale*, *We The People*, *Love's Labour's Lost* (Shakespeare's Globe); *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory); *Romeo and Juliet* (Creation Theatre); *The Mousetrap* (St. Martin's Theatre, West End); *Charley's Aunt* (Menier Chocolate Factory/Theatre Royal, Bath); *Lady Windermere's Fan* (Manchester Royal Exchange); *Smith* (InSite Performance); *Noises Off*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *Hay Fever*, *Keep Smiling Through*, *See How They Run*, *The Shape of Things* (Theatre by the Lake). Radio credits include: *Pilgrim*, *The Siege of Krishnapur*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *Restless*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, *Weird Tales*, *Welcome to the Wasteland*, *Edward II*, *Farewell Symphony* and *Wedding Dresses* (all for BBC Radio Drama).

He is also a graduate of the Young Writers' Programme at the Royal Court. Writing credits include: *The House of Gingerbread* (Edinburgh Fringe/Arcola Theatre); *In Bed With Messalina* (Eyestrings Theatre Company/Drama Centre London); *Love in the Time of Texting* (Theatre503); *Necessary Evil* (Menagerie Theatre Company/The Junction Theatre, Cambridge/Soho Theatre); *The Lady of the Lake* (Theatre by the Lake).

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